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THE GIRL STOOD STILL WITH A WILD, WHITE FACE, RIGHT IN THE WAY OF THE APPROACHING DANGER.

BLIND BUT BEAUTIFUL.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"THE loveliest creature I ever set eyes on!" And Digby Stretton turned his splendid eyes on his brother, and looked as if he expected him to speak.

Hubert Stretton laughed; Digby was always seeing the most beautiful girls in the world, he declared.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"Haven't the least notion, my dear fellow," his brother replied. "She was sitting under the old oak in the wood yonder, all by herself. She was dressed in white, and—"

"A full-blown Dryad!" Hubert said, laughing. "Did you attempt to propitiate her goddessship in any way? though the Dryads were not

quite goddesses, according to Lempriere. A sort of half-and-half divinity, half mortal and half vegetable, wasn't it?"

"Don't chaff, Bertie, my boy; my Dryad was a lady, the loveliest I ever saw. You will say so when you see her."

"H'm, perhaps," the younger brother said—he was fastidious in the matter of female beauty. "Describe your beauty, Digby, my lad, and let me hear what she was like."

"She was lovely, that is almost all I can tell you," was the somewhat hesitating response. "She puzzled me."

"As how?"

"By the way she sat—she was as still as a statue; but that her eyes were open I should have thought she was asleep. I never saw such a face; no painter ever pictured such a one; no sculptor ever moulded such perfect features since Galatea sprang to life under the hand of Pygmalion."

"Bravo, brother mine," Hubert Stretton said, laughing. "It is a pity the young lady is not

here to hear your rhapsody. I expect she is some sentimental miss from the town, or some country cousin at the Rectory; they are always having all sorts of people there."

"Whoever she is she is a refined lady," Digby Stretton said, warmly. "I gathered that much from her voice and manner."

"Her voice?"

"Yes, it is music itself."

"You talked with her, then?"

"Hardly! We spoke to each other. Lion here brushed rather roughly against her skirts—she was sitting close to a favourite hole of his, and he suspected designs on his rabbits, I suspect. She started as if she were frightened, and a curious look came into her face."

"I apologised, of course, and she looked me full in the face with such bewitching eyes; there was a far-away look in them, as if she saw beyond me somehow. I could hardly make her out; but she spoke, and her voice was music. She did not move, but she put out her hands in an odd sort of way, and—"

"Ah! An æsthetic young person, evidently," Hubert said, lighting a fresh cigar. "Those crazy folks do stare at you as if they were looking through you at something else. That's their way of appearing 'intense.' You have not told me yet what she was like, old fellow—whether she was dark or fair, blue-eyed or brown, old or young, or—"

For answer Digby Stretton burst into such a panegyric on the young lady he had seen that his brother only laughed and declared he must see the lady for himself, for she seemed to be every style of beauty at once. She was lovely, that seemed to be all that Digby could tell him, and her dress and manner betokened that she was a gentlewoman, and they both wondered that they had never set eyes on her before. Digby had never seen such a face and form since he came into his kingdom, and become master of the old house on the terrace behind them.

A grand old place was Stretton Royal—a place for any man to be proud of—and it looked grandly beautiful with the sweet summer sunshine softened by coming evening, shining down upon it, and making all its windows glitter as if diamonds had been thrown broadcast against them by a giant hand.

Old, grey, and ivy-covered, its walls had seen many a change since the first of the handsome Strettons attracted the eye of the Virgin Queen and had received the reward of his beauty and his merit by being ennobled by her queenly hands.

There had been a Sir Digby Stretton of Stretton ever since, and the house had proved its gratitude by remaining loyal even in the most troublous times, when to be king's partisan was to come to the block too often—to be ruined and sent naked on the world almost a certainty.

Stretton Royal could show the chamber where a Stuart hid from his enemies and found loyalty and good faith, despite large offered rewards and threatened punishment, and the deep hole in the dark cellar where the family plate and heirlooms lay hidden while Cromwell ransacked and routed in vain. And the family records were full of traditions of the bravery and incorruptible loyalty of the Strettons of that day.

There were brave stories, too, of the family as it descended; there was the Stretton of Blenheim, and the one who died at the head of his regiment at Waterloo; and there was a handsome merry-eyed portrait in the great banqueting hall, the original of which lay far away out on the bleak hillsides in the Crimea. The Strettons had served their country well, and were held in respect far and near.

They were not a numerous family; there were but few women amongst them. It happens so sometimes in families, and the two young men who were alone in the great house now had no sister.

Their father had been dead about a year, and the Sir Digby Stretton who had succeeded him was young and well beloved of all who knew him, but he lacked the wonderful beauty of the old race. He had had it, he was born to it as an inheritance, but fate had willed it otherwise, and when he was five years old an accident befell him which deprived his face at once and for ever of any claim to beauty.

No one quite knew how it happened—his nurse denied all knowledge of how the catastrophe came about; the child's clothes caught fire, and before he could be reached he was terribly burned.

He was a sturdy little fellow, and he soon recovered, but the finely cut, handsome features, the badge of the Stretton race, had disappeared for ever. His eyes had escaped—they were as brilliant and as speaking as before, and there was a charm about the smile that nothing, not even the fiery baptism the child had received, could take away.

"It will not be so much a scarred face as a distorted one," the family physician said to the sorrowing mother. "The actual scars will wear out, but the shape of the face will be altered," and Lady Stretton almost wished in her heart that her idolised boy might die, so passionately did she grieve over what had befallen him. She had been so proud of him, so delighted with his childish loveliness, that the cruel fate that

deprived him of it was almost a death-blow to her.

She lived to forget all about it, to see her son make up for his want of beauty by all sorts of endearing qualities that his younger and handsomer brother lacked, and to know that he had been to his invalid father a strong arm and a right hand to the day of his death.

Everybody loved Digby, from the fond father who idolised his heir and forgot that he was not as handsome as his younger brother, down to the big dog that was crouching at his feet now as he stood with his brother on the soft grass below the great terrace, where royalty had strolled and chatted before now like any other ordinary mortals.

"It will be something to tell the master when she comes home," Hubert said, puffing away the rings of smoke and trying to blow some of them into Lion's eyes, an affront which the big dog received with sublime indifference, only turning his great head away and putting his black muzzle into his master's hand; "she is always interested in your love affairs; they take the place of novels to her I verily believe."

"I never have any love affairs," said Sir Digby, with a half sigh. "You know that, Bertie. I never shall have. What woman would marry me!"

"Half the women in creation, my dear boy. You have only to throw the handkerchief, and you'll see."

"Ah, perhaps," the elder brother said, "but what woman would love me, Bertie? I have seen them turn away with a shudder when they have been introduced to me, and—"

"And that's all bosh!" Hubert said, heartily. "You are too sensitive by half; the old house yonder and the Stretton acres would blind any woman."

"Yes, I know," the baronet said, and there was a ring of pain in his deep, resonant voice. He had the Stretton voice left him—the voice that the poor said was "as good as music" to hear; "but I will take no woman so blinded for my wife. Until someone will have me for myself alone, and forget that I am as ugly as the veiled prophet of Korassan, I will bring no mistress here. The family honour will come to you, Bertie; you will be a fitting master of the old home some day."

"Heaven forbid, if it costs me you," the younger man said, and he meant it. Reckless and headstrong though he was, costing his mother many a bitter tear and sleepless night, Hubert Stretton dearly loved his brother, and would have given his life to serve him. They would have resembled each other very closely but for the unfortunate accident that had deprived the elder of his good looks, and they had two points of resemblance left still—their eyes and the remarkable voice.

Not seeing them Lady Stretton often declared she could not tell her sons apart—their voices were so similar, and they bore a masculine resemblance to her own, which was very soft and sweet. She was a stately lady of rather a bygone pattern, who looked like a queen in her velvets and lace, and who kept up the dignity of the house to its fullest extent. In spite of the somewhat careless good-fellowship of the baronet, and the reckless dissipation of her younger son, she was away on a short visit when the Dryad adventure, as his brother called it, befell Sir Digby, and Hubert proposed to relate it to her when she returned.

"There are new people at 'The Limes,'" he said to his brother; "perhaps your wood nymph belongs to them."

"Has the mother called there?"

"Not yet. Get her to when she comes back. It is a lady who has taken the house, I know."

"It is a serious case, I can see," Hubert Stretton said, as they went into the house—and he was right. It was serious, if to tell in love with an ideal were a serious matter. It was just what his brother had done. Somehow or other his heart had gone out of his keeping, and fluttered to the feet of the unconscious girl who had sat under the old oak in the wood that morning.

Two or three days passed by, and Digby saw no more of the mysterious stranger. The brothers

haunted the wood, and strolled through the lanes, and all to no purpose; there was no sign of any one except the ordinary people belonging to the place.

They heard of the new-comers to the house Hubert had called "The Limes;" a handsome house just outside their own park gates. It had once been the Dower House of the Strettons, but through some forgotten litigation had passed out of their hands and was out of their domain; it was always inhabited by people of birth and condition, and had only recently been vacated through the death of its occupier.

The brothers heard that a lady had taken it, Mrs. Elmont by name, and that she had daughters, but that they were all away just then, not to return for a few days.

"So your innuendoes did not come from there," Hubert said to his brother, after they had heard this piece of intelligence. "She was a waif from the big world of London, I suspect, out for a holiday. You will see her no more, I suspect."

"I have a feeling that I shall," Sir Digby replied, and he was right. The time was coming very soon when he should see that sweet face again and hear that gentle voice that had gone to his heart with such a tender thrill.

Two days later his brother had gone to meet their mother, who was returning home, and Sir Digby, detained by business that he could not put off, was walking to the house of a tenant through a shady lane that ran along one side of the park.

It was a sweet, secluded spot—a bit of real ruralism; the hedges fragrant with the scent of wild roses and honeysuckle, and bright with flowers of all sorts.

He was lounging along when he heard the sound of wheels and the rattle of a horse's hoofs, as if some vehicle were being very carelessly driven, or a horse had run away.

It came in sight while he was wondering—an empty trap, drawn by a frightened and evidently runaway horse, the little vehicle rocking from side to side and threatening to turn over every moment.

At the same instant a white figure started up from the side of the path—a slight girl who had evidently been sitting down on the grassy edge of the path. It was the girl he had seen in the wood, and she stood still with a wild, white face, right in the way of the approaching danger.

CHAPTER II.

It was all over in a moment, as Digby Stretton told his brother afterwards. He had sprung forward at the risk of his own life, for the frantic horse and the rocking vehicle were within a very few yards of him, and with a desperate grip had seized the girl and flung her on to the bank from which she had risen, rolling into the hedge himself, and struggling wildly amongst the briars and stinging nettles in a most unromantic and unheroic fashion.

He recovered himself as the horse flew by, and shook himself free of the thorns and leaves, and went to the young lady.

She had fainted from fright, and he raised her beautiful head, and took off her hat. His eyes had not deceived him—it was the same lovely girl he had seen under the old oak, and she was lovelier than ever as she lay upon his arm, pale as marble, and cold and still as death itself.

A wealth of golden hair fell over his knee as he supported her, and dark eyelashes swept the cheeks that were so pale, yet so beautifully rounded.

She was daintily dressed, though very simply, in a muslin dress, with a broad-bimmed straw hat.

Everything about her told its own tale of fastidious neatness. From the delicate lace ruffles at her neck to the tip of her little boot her attire was that of a lady.

And yet he had never seen her before. How came she there? and what had made her start into the middle of the road like that? It was as

if she did not see the coming danger, or was not conscious what she was doing.

She opened her eyes as he was wondering what he should do or how he should get help, and he saw their brilliant beauty looking straight into his. There was no consciousness in her face, no confusion. She put her hand on his breast, and said, in a bewildered voice,—

"Is that you, Dormer?"

She was evidently not herself yet. Her fright had shaken her terribly, and he laid her gently down, fearing to alarm her further.

"Are you better?" he asked. "I hope I have not hurt you?"

"No, I am not hurt," she replied. "What has happened? Where is Dormer. I do not know you."

"You were in danger of being knocked down by a runaway horse. I was fortunate to be able to help you. I think the fright made you faint. You did not see."

"See! How could I! Who are you that is speaking to me?"

"Not see!" and Digby Stretton looked into the beautiful face with something like awe. "Is it possible you do not see me now?"

"I can see nothing—I am blind."

There was a sad ring in the sweet voice, and the young man looked at her with pity and admiration unutterable.

No one would have known from a casual glance that there was anything the matter with the sweet, pensive-looking eyes, and the rest of the face was as expressive as if she had seen and noticed everything that was going on around her.

Digby looked at her, and longed to clasp her and her helplessness to his heart, and tell her how sorry he was for her.

"Blind!" he ejaculated. "I did not know; I could not tell. I am afraid I have frightened you terribly."

"No," she replied. "I was terribly frightened. I heard the noise, and I thought I should be killed, and I could not make Dormer hear. I suppose she has not come back. Then you have saved my life! How shall I thank you? Ah, I cannot! Mamma must do that."

"Will you tell me who 'mamma' is, and let me take you home?" Digby asked as nervously as if he were a schoolboy and she a duchess. "I do not see your attendant. She was with you?"

"Oh, yes; I sent her for something. I was not afraid to be left alone. I like sitting out-of-doors, and this lane is very secluded."

"Not so secluded that runaway horses don't come along it sometimes," Digby said; and the girl looked up at him with a light coming into her eyes.

"I know you," she said. "You spoke to me in the wood. You are the gentleman with the dog."

"For whose rudeness I most heartily apologise. He is not fierce, only excitable. You must allow me to introduce him to you some day in a more gentle fashion."

"Oh! I was not afraid of him," the girl said; "I was only startled. I cannot see anything coming, you know, and he came upon me in a somewhat sudden fashion."

"That he did. Here is someone running across the field—a woman in a blue gown. Will that be your attendant?"

"Yes, that is Dormer. She is very fond of blue. Thank you once more, Sir Digby. Mamma must speak for me. I cannot say all I would. My heart is too full."

"You know me, then?"

"Everybody could tell me who it was that had a dog called Lion, and a pleasant, kindly voice. Your people sing your praises, I tell you."

"Since you know me, may I now hear your name?"

"Did I not tell it you? I am Beryl Blount. Mamma lives at the Dover House. She is away just now. When she comes back and hears what you have done she will thank you for us all, Dormer, is that you? What are you crying for?"

A stoutish, comely-faced country woman, very much out of breath, had burst through the

hedge not many paces from them, and was sobbing violently, and mopping her hot face with her apron.

"It was the horse, dear. I saw it and the trap all broken, and I knew where I had left you, and I thought you must be killed or hurt, for it passed close here, didn't it?"

"I should have been killed but for this gentleman," Beryl Blount replied. "I was right in the way of it. I ought not to have sent you away, Dormer. I have no more sense than a baby when I am left to myself, and let my ears play me strange pranks. Don't cry in that idiotic way. There's nothing the matter."

"Except the gentleman's face," said the mother-of-fact Dormer. "He's scratched it awful. It's quite a sight."

"It is nothing, I assure you," Digby said, remembering that the blood was trickling off his chin, and making him an object to be stared at, if nothing more. "I had to take a header into the hedge, that was all, and there were thorns there."

"I should think there were," Dormer said, shortly; "big ones. You had better come home with my young lady and me, sir, and get a basin of water. You'd frighten anyone belonging to you. I can tell you, if they were to see you now."

"But Miss Blount says her mamma is away, and I should hardly like to take the liberty," Digby began. But Dormer cut him short.

"Mamma is away," she said, "but I am there. You come along, sir; you can't go back through the village like that. Miss Beryl won't be satisfied till you do come."

"No, indeed, I shan't; please come," the blind girl said, holding out her hand, which Digby took and clasped, forgetting that he had only known her name a few minutes. "Please let us do what we can for you. I am so sorry!"

"There is nothing to be sorry for, I assure you. My scratches are only skin deep. A little water will clear away all traces of them. I had forgotten all about them till your servant reminded me that I had been in the war."

He drew her arm through his, and with Dormer on the other side of her they walked towards the Dover House, which was far nearer than Stretton Royal to the place where Beryl had so nearly been killed. Nothing could have saved her had not help been at hand. She was right in the path of the terrified horse, and must inevitably have been thrown down and run over if Digby had not been there to aid her.

"Mamma will be back on Tuesday," Beryl Blount said, as they entered the house; and her escort smiled to himself as he thought how he and his brother had determined that the fair unknown of the wood could not belong to the Dover House because the inhabitants thereof were away. She had been left behind with Dormer, and was welcoming him with the ease of a young duchess, and with as much coolness and courtesy as if she could see.

"Dormer, take Sir Digby to a room and see that he has everything he wants," she said. "I am sorry we have no man to wait on you," she added to him with a pretty smile. "Mamma does not keep one now, and there is only one servant here to-day besides Dormer; but if you would like your own man—"

"Oh, no, thank you," the Baronet replied, "I am very independent; in fact, though, I would not own as much to everybody. 'My gentleman,' as he calls himself, is rather an old man of the sea to me at times; I like to wait on myself."

"Blind!" said Sir Digby to himself, as he washed the traces of his tussle with the thorns from his face, and mused as he looked at himself in the glass. "Am I glad of it, I wonder? I think I am. It is something to know that she can never turn with disgust from the sight of my misshapen face—never. Bah! What a fool I am! What an utter brainless idiot! What is she to me?—what am I to her? Nothing! We may never see each other again, and there may be some one else in her life that— Digby Stretton you are an idiot. Look at your face and come to your senses. But she is blind—blind, she can never see it, and—"

"If you please, sir, Miss Beryl has had luncheon served in the morning-room, and she says will you take a mouthful before you go, if you don't mind humouring her, poor dear. She will be so pleased, I know."

The last part of the invitation was Dormer's own interpolation. Beryl had simply charged her with a request that Sir Digby would lunch before he went. Would he? Would he not? He would have done anything she asked him. He had fallen blindly down and worshipped her ever since that chance meeting in the wood; and it needed no persuasion of Dormer's to make him give a ready assent to the request.

He remembered, with a smile, what the woman had said, when he hesitated about going home with them in the absence of the young lady's mamma; and he knew perfectly well that if there was any blame, when Mrs. Blount returned, it would rest on her shoulders, and Beryl would be held blameless.

So he went down to fall more abjectly in love than ever with the lovely vision of beauty that met him at the door of the pretty room where the simple repast had been laid out.

With her hat off, and the sunny hair crowding her shapely head, Beryl Blount looked even more bewitching than in her outdoor costume, and Digby watched her as she moved about with perfect grace and fearlessness, feeling as if he were in a dream.

Dormer remained in attendance to wait upon her young mistress and play propriety, and Beryl chatted to her guest as if she had known him all her life.

She had the fearlessness of a child, combined with the graceful charm of a woman; and the Baronet listened and talked, forgetting everything but the pleasure of the hour.

He learned a little about the Blounts during the luncheon. That they were people of refinement and means he judged from everything around him.

Mrs. Blount was a widow—that he had gathered before—and fond of a country life, and she had three daughters—one married, in India, one a beauty much admired, at present with her mother on a visit, and his charming hostess, whom he decided must be the most beautiful of them all.

Mrs. Blount was the widow of a Colonel in the army, and had left his wife an ample fortune, and provided for his girls as well; Beryl pointed to his portrait hanging over the mantelpiece with evident pride.

"That is papa," she said; "but not half handsome enough. He has only been dead three years. I used to think him the handsomest man that ever existed."

"Then you could see him? You were not always—"

Not always blind, Digby Stretton was going to say, but he stopped suddenly, remembering that he might be touching on a painful topic; but Beryl understood and replied,—

"No; I could see once," she said, with just a little sadness in her voice. "I have been blind about seven years—it was from an illness and cold, at least the doctors says so. I am thankful that it did not destroy the look of my eyes as well as their usefulness."

The speech sounded as if there were a touch of vanity in it; but nothing was farther from her thoughts.

"I like people to like me," she said, naively, "and it is so difficult to love ugly folks, is it not?"

"Is it?" asked Digby, with a sudden heart-ache. Was he not ugly beyond redemption?

"I used to think so," she answered; "I can only like or dislike people now from their actions and words. I judge by the sound of a person's voice what they are like. Mamma says I am infallible in that way."

"I am afraid Lion's voice was not prepossessing the other day, then," the baronet said; "he gave tongue in a fashion likely to scare any lady."

"It was a good honest bark," Beryl said, simply, and matched his master's voice well. I think you have the very nicest voice I ever heard, Sir Digby."

CHAPTER III.

DIGBY STRETTON's heart gave a great bound at the pretty words and the sweetly spoken compliment. Her gentle eyes were turned to his face just as if she could see, and it was hard to believe that there was nothing but darkness there—they were such speaking eyes. There was a searching, inquiring expression about them that is sometimes very painful in a blind person, but in this lovely girl it only just hinted at pathos; her face expressed nothing but gentle content and bright thankfulness when anything fresh came under her notice.

"I must be dreaming," the young Baronet said to himself. "It cannot be real. This lovely girl like a princess out of a fairy tale—and I here alone with her as if I had known her all my life, and she cannot see me—cannot look upon my face and recoil at it as I have seen many do."

They were virtually alone. Dormer was in attendance on her young mistress, placing what she wanted within her reach and waiting for orders, but she paid no attention to anything that went on, and might have been a stone statue in her imperturbability. Digby Stretton was amazed at the deft manner in which the blind girl waited on herself and did the honours of her table. She never made a mistake or touched the wrong thing, and he almost forgot to eat while watching her.

"You pay me a very high compliment," he said. "I am afraid you would think me the very rudest man in the world if you could see me now."

"Rude men never speak as you do," she replied quietly. "What are you doing that is so terrible?"

"Staring at you. I can hardly believe that you cannot see me. No one would know that you were—that you couldn't see, to watch you now."

"Ah! who is paying compliments now?" Beryl said, smiling. "If I am not so helpless as some blind people I owe it all to Dormer. Where are you, Dormer?"

"Here, Miss Beryl."

"She has taken such pains with me," the girl went on, possessing herself of the hand of her attendant, and laying her cheek upon it. Sir Digby thought he would have given half his possessions if it had been his hand instead of Dormer's. "She has taught me to be quite independent. I was very fretful and unkind at first, and if she had not been the most patient and loving of women she would have let me alone; but she said I should find the benefit of it all afterwards, and so I have. It is almost as if I had my eyes—she has taught me to do everything in the dark."

"Ah, she has taught herself, sir," the faithful servant said. "There never was such a patient creature," and Beryl smiled and said,—

"There, there, Dormer, that will do," with a pretty air of authority, and dismissed the subject with quiet tact and good breeding.

"I do hope you are enjoying your lunch," she said to her companion. "I cannot see whether you are eating or not. I hope you didn't hurt yourself very much."

"Oh, my hurt was nothing. 'A little water clears us of this deed,' as Lady Macbeth says. I have left all my scratches in the dressing-room; besides, a scratch more or less does not signify to me much."

"Dear me, most gentlemen are very particular about their faces."

"Ah, well, I am not one of them," Sir Digby said. "Miss Blount, may I take you home and introduce you to my mother? She will be delighted. Lion, get out! What brings you here, sir?"

His speech was interrupted by a squeal from Dormer and the sudden entrance of Lion through the window. Dormer had a rooted belief that every big dog she met was bent upon instantly devouring her, and Lion had brushed past her with scant ceremony in his search for his master.

"He has broken his chain," Sir Digby said. "He will do it sometimes when he misses me."

Don't be frightened, Miss Blount; he will not hurt you."

"No, I'm sure he will not," Beryl said, as the big dog, having snuffed round her for a moment, sat down by her side and laid his head in her lap, as if he were conscious of her affliction and would not scare her by jumping up or offering her a paw she could not see.

"Lion is a gentleman," she said, "like his master," and again Sir Digby felt himself cringing all over at the outspoken compliment.

It did not seem to occur to Beryl that she was saying anything out of the common in thus speaking her mind. She said what she thought, as any child would have done, and her guest felt a wild longing to take her in his strong arms and kiss her sweet face. He was giddy with the new and delightful emotion. He had never seen a woman who charmed him as this helpless blind girl did.

"I must go," he said, somewhat suddenly, looking into her sweet face and wondering whether she guessed what made his voice tremble and the hand that he touched her with shake as if it were a leaf. "They will wonder what has become of me at home, especially now that Lion has set forth in search of me. He only does that when he is very much disturbed about his master."

"You will come again?" she said, simply. "I am afraid I have detained you a long time, but I am so grateful to you, and it has been so pleasant to hear you talk; and bring Lion, please—I think he likes me."

"I shall be only too glad, and so will Lion," Sir Digby said, pressing the little hand that lay so confidently in his own. "When Mrs. Blount returns my mother will have much pleasure in making her acquaintance—and yours."

"Oh, please don't wait for mamma," Beryl pleaded, a look of disappointment clouding her fair face. "She may stay away ever so long. She knows I am quite safe with Dormer, and that I don't care for company, and—"

"I will bring my mother whenever you like, if you are quite sure that Mrs. Blount would like it," Digby said. "She will be at home to-night, I expect, and with another pressure of the hand and a loving look into her sightless eyes, which would have spoken volumes to her could she but have seen it, he left her."

"He's gone!" sighed Beryl, as she stood by the window listening to his retreating footsteps.

"Yes, dearie, he's gone," Dormer said, rather shortly; "and I don't know that I ought to have let him come here at all."

"Not let him come! Why, Dormer, he saved me from being killed. I should have been dead by now but for him."

"Yes, I know, my darling," Dormer said, lovingly. "But it would have been as well to let him go straight home. But for his face, and he had scratched it terribly, poor young gentleman, I should not have asked him here."

"Then you would have been a spiteful thing, Dormer," Beryl said, somewhat petulantly. "Why, it has been like a gleam of sunlight talking to him and listening to his glorious voice, Dormer. A man with a voice like that ought to be as handsome as a god."

"Well, he isn't to say handsome," Dormer said, smiling to herself, as she thought of Digby Stretton's scarred face; "but he's as nice a gentleman as I ever saw."

"Nice! he's glorious. I should love him dearly if I knew him better; I know I should."

"Dear heart, Miss Beryl, that's not the way a young lady should talk of a gentleman. I hope he won't come here any more till your ma comes back; we mustn't let him in till we know whether she will approve of it."

"Ah! what have I done that you should speak to me in that tone!" Beryl asked in dismay. "You make me feel as if I had done something unladylike or improper; perhaps I have, and he will dislike me for it. I am so different from other girls. I cannot see like them when I have made a mistake; I cannot read people's faces. I can only judge by their voices, and his was all music, Dormer!"

Her overstrained nerves gave way, and she burst into passionate weeping; and Dormer,

taking her to her heart as if she were a little child, comforted her and soothed her, and tried to make her understand that she had not been blaming her, but feeling all the time that she wished her mistress would come back. It was dangerous for Miss Beryl to be talking of a man as if she had already learned to love him, and she had only met him twice, and for aught she knew he might be going to be married to someone else.

"Not that anyone will want to marry her, poor darling," she said to herself, in thinking the matter over. "There's no love of that sort for her, and she ought to be kept out of the way of it. She'll just go on talking to missis as she has talked to me, and I shall catch it. I hope he won't come here any more while we are by ourselves."

Dormer need not have been afraid. Digby Stretton was fated not to see her young mistress for some time. A calamity had happened while he had been out that morning that was nearly ending as seriously as the one from which he had had the good fortune to save Beryl Blount.

Striding up the avenue with bent head, intent on self-communing, and wondering at himself for the strange new happiness that seemed to fill his heart and make another man of him, he ran full tilt against someone coming in the opposite direction.

"Oh! Sir Digby, I beg your pardon," the man said—it was one of his own servants—"I was running to seek you, sir. An accident has happened."

"An accident!"

"Yes, sir," breathlessly.

"To whom?"

"To Mr. Stretton, sir; he was in the gun room and—"

"And what? for Heaven's sake speak, man," Digby said, for the man had paused from sheer want of breath.

"They hardly know yet, sir, I think. I was sent off to fetch you before the doctor got there; but he isn't dead, Sir Digby. Don't look like that, indeed he isn't. I was to say he was badly hurt; that was all they could tell. Mrs. Welford was with him, and Mr. and Mrs. Hastings had come over from the Rectory, and the doctor was sent for. Jem took Black Diamond. He said he was sure you would not mind."

"Mind! Of course not," Digby Stretton said, his heart sinking within him as he listened. What should he say to his mother when she returned that evening if her darling was dead? He gathered that Hubert had been cleaning a gun, which must have been loaded. There was no other way, of accounting for what had happened, and it had gone off or burst—the servant did not know which—and wounded him badly in the thigh and hand.

He forgot Beryl Blount's very existence as he bent over the pale form on the library sofa, and wondered whether the kindly eyes would unclose again, and whether his brother's voice would ever give him glad some greeting in this world again.

"She would not have grieved so much if it had been me instead of him," he thought, with just a tinge of bitterness as he thought with grief of his mother and her home-coming. "What shall I say to her when she asks for her boy?"

"Take care of Bertie" had always been Lady Stretton's injunction to her elder son when the two had been boys, and Digby had taken care of Bertie in every possible fashion ever since they had been two rollicking school-boys together, and as far as he could through their life since.

Bertie had been a trouble and an anxiety to him always—everlastingly in scrapes—from some of which it was difficult to extricate him, and more difficult still to keep the knowledge of them from his mother; but, with all his follies, loved and cherished as prodigal sons always contrive to be.

"It will go far to kill her if anything happens to him," his brother thought, as he waited for the fiat of the doctors; and he fairly broke down and sobbed when they came to him and told him that, with all due care, it would not be death this time. Bertie was sorely hurt, and would lie a helpless cripple for some time, but unless something unforeseen happened he would live.

"No, I'm not dead, old boy," Bertie's voice said to him when he bent over him in thankfulness for restored sense, and knowledge of what was passing around him.

"You are not to get rid of me this time. Don't let the matter frighten herself into a fit when she comes back. I am only weak from the shock and the bleeding; I don't know how I came to be such a confounded ass."

There was more the matter than that, but there was great cause for thankfulness that things were no worse; and Lady Stretton, when she returned, wept tears of mingled joy and sorrow over what had come to pass.

No wonder that she heard nothing of Digby's adventure, and that the baronet forgot for a time the fascination of Beryl's sweet eyes, and winsome face, and thought only of his brother lying between life and death, and the mother who was sorrowing over him so deeply.

CHAPTER IV.

ALMOST the first persons to call and inquire after the invalid were the mother and sister of Beryl Blount. They had not been introduced to Lady Stretton and her son, but they made their gratitude for Digby's rescue of the blind girl serve as an introduction to the stately lady of Stretton Royal; they had hurried home on hearing of the peril she had been in, much to Miss Blount's disgust. She loved her sister according to her lights, and when her affection for her did not interfere with any enjoyment of her own; but she was a wilful beauty, and loved her own way, and this "disagreeable affair," as she chose to call it, curtailed a very pleasant visit, and brought the attentions of a decidedly eligible young gentleman to an untimely end.

"Mamma is so absurdly fond of Beryl," she said to one of her companions who was bewailing her departure, "that she cannot be satisfied with Dormer's account of her, but must drag us back to make sure that she is all right."

"Dormer should take more care of her than allow her to roam about the lanes and fields by herself in that way."

There was some honey amongst the gall, after all. She would be introduced to Sir Digby Stretton, and he was a decidedly eligible man—young, rich, and unmarried; which latter fault she proposed to herself to correct in due time. She had heard he was very ugly, but what of that! He was a baronet with as many thousands a-year as her mother owned hundreds, and would make a capital match.

Mrs. Blount and her daughters had come from quite another part of the country to the Stretton Dower House, as it was still called, so the two ladies were quite strangers to each other, and regarded one another with not a little curiosity. Mrs. Blount was a stately person, with much dignity and self-satisfaction about her, but she was by no means such a thorough-bred looking woman as Lady Stretton, who looked like an empress, and greeted them with the courtesy of a queen.

"It is very kind of you to see us at all," Mrs. Blount said, when they had mutually introduced themselves and were seated. "I did not expect it. But I could not help coming to tell you how grateful we all are. I should have lost my darling but for your brave son. May I not see him and thank him for myself?"

"He will hardly leave his brother for a moment," Lady Stretton said, touching the bell, "but he will be glad to hear from your lips that the young lady is none the worse for her fright. Sometimes the ill-effects of such an accident do not show themselves directly. Digby's scratches, for instance, are far uglier to-day than they were at first. You have heard of his struggles with the brambles, I daresay?"

"My poor girl at home believes he was nearly scratched to death. I think," Mrs. Blount said; "she is apt to magnify things, as blind people will. She was terribly excited when she heard of what had happened to your younger son. I hope the accounts that have reached us grew in the carrying!"

"All is well now, I hope and believe," Lady Stretton replied. "My boy's recovery will be slow, but it is tolerably sure now. Digby, here is Mrs. Blount come to see and thank you, and to make kind inquiries for our dear Hubert."

Digby Stretton's heart gave a great leap as he greeted the mother of the blind syren who had taken his heart captive.

He had been too much occupied with Hubert to think of aught else till now. But his thoughts went flying to Beryl now, and there was a break in his voice as he took her mother's hand, and asked for her.

"Quite well, and always talking about you," Mrs. Blount said; and such a light came into his face at her words that Miss Blount startled, and said to herself that it was all nonsense to call him ugly. There was so much expression in his face that the disfigurement was hardly noticeable.

And so the introduction was made, and an acquaintance inaugurated between the ladies of the Dower House and Lady Digby; and the latter paid a return visit as soon as she could leave Hubert, who was recovering slowly, and was as exacting and selfish as invalids usually are.

"Mrs. Blount and Miss Blount are out, ma'am," was Dormer's answer to the lady's question; "but Miss Beryl is at home, if you would please to walk in."

"I should like to see Miss Beryl very much," the lady said, "that is, if she is willing. Is she afraid of strangers?"

"No, ma'am, she is just as if she could see—you would hardly know."

Beryl started from her seat eagerly at the sound of Lady Stretton's name. At last she would have news of him; the time had seemed so long since that delightful day when he had sat beside her in that room, and talked to her, and broken bread with her; and he had promised to come, and she had never seen him since. His dog had come more than once, walked into the house, and sat down beside her as if he would have brought her some message if he could speak. He was there now, to Lady Stretton's great amazement. She caught sight of his great head resting on Beryl's knee as Dormer showed her into the room, and she said, somewhat sharply,—"My son is not here, is he?"

"No, my lady," Dormer replied—she had recollected herself, and said "ma'am" no more. "He often comes like that, does the dog. Every dumb thing takes to my young lady, bless her, and she is very fond of a great dog."

Lady Stretton looked for a moment at the sweet inquiring face turned so eagerly towards her, and then she took Beryl's hands and drew her close to her, and kissed her. It was an unusual caress for her to bestow; she was not of the gushing order of women, but there was something about Beryl Blount's face that made everyone long to embrace her; just as some people carry about them a certain something that makes other folks' hands tingle to box their ears, and their feet quiver with the desire to administer a kick.

"My dear," Lady Stretton said, gently, "I am so thankful my boy was there to do what he did; and then she sat down beside the girl, and they were friends from that hour. Beryl chattered away to the stately lady whose advent she had rather dreaded, and listened to all sorts of stories about Stretton Royal and its master till her mother returned, and the conversation turned into a conventional groove, whither she could not follow it.

And Lady Stretton went home and told her son where she had been, and how she had seen the blind girl of whom he had spoken, and Digby looked her straight in the face and said,—

"Then you have seen my future wife, mother."

"Your what?"

"My future wife."

"Do you know who you are talking about, Digby? I was speaking of that poor blind child."

"You were talking about Miss Beryl Blount, the woman to whom, Heaven willing, I am going

to offer my hand and heart. Offer, did I say? Ah, never, she has the latter already."

"I think you must be going mad!" Lady Stretton said, in amazement. "She is no wife for you, my son."

"She is a well-born lady, mother; there is never a Stretton on the walls of the old gallery yonder that was anything better."

"But she is blind, Digby—a creature lacking a sense. Is there ever a Stretton yonder that was halt, or lame, or blind, or had a blemish of any sort? Think what you are saying. You don't mean it, surely!—a girl you have only seen twice."

"If I had only seen her for one single instant, mother, it was time enough for my heart to claim her as its own. Don't talk of blemishes, dear; I have enough for the whole line of Strettons. Thank Heaven, she cannot see them!"

"But have you asked her, Digby? What does she say?"

"I shall ask her," Sir Digby replied. "If she says me nay, mother—"

"Well, my boy, if she does?"

"I shall never ask another woman while my life lasts. I can't talk about it, mother. I am no loveless boy falling in love with every girl I meet. I am a man, with a man's passions and a man's hope, and I have met the woman who shall share my life with me if Heaven wills; if it does not, I will go through the world alone, and let Hubert have my place."

Lady Stretton was sorely troubled about what her son had told her. She knew right well that argument on any subject only made his purpose more firm.

He was of age, and she had no jurisdiction, and she could not talk to Hubert about it; the least excitement in his weak state would most likely be fatal, the doctors had said, and what would excite him more than the news that his brother contemplated matrimony?

Somehow, he had come to look upon himself as the heir. Digby's excessive sensitiveness about his personal appearance would keep him a bachelor, in all probability, and then the place and its revenues would come to him, the handsome son of a handsome race.

What good times he would have when he came into his own! What a house he would keep, and what a name he would make for himself in all the country side!

He was reckoning without his host, this handsome, careless Hubert. Even while he was lying helpless and suffering the mistress of Stretton Royal was chosen, the wife that was to take her place by her husband's side was coming to court him and his hopes for ever.

"Do I understand you rightly, Sir Digby? I am afraid not," and Mrs. Blount stared at the baronet, who had asked for an interview with her, as if she thought he had somehow lost his senses.

"I hope you do, madam. I tried to make my meaning plain."

"You ask me to give you my daughter for your wife—my poor blind child?"

"I do. From my heart I entreat you not to turn a deaf ear to my suit. I never thought to care for any woman—that is, I never hoped that any woman would ever care for me—until I met her. Ah! Mrs. Blount, she has come to be the one thing in all the world for me. Do not refuse her to me. I will cherish her and love her as wife was never loved or cherished before. She shall not have an ungratified wish."

"I am sure of that," Mrs. Blount said, somewhat hesitatingly. She was flattered and delighted with the proposal, but she wished it had been to her other daughter, her beautiful Ellenor. Poor Beryl could never make a sensation in the world, and she had hoped in a quiet fashion—for she was too much of a lady ever to show that she was husband-hunting for her daughters—that Sir Digby would be fascinated by her lovely Ellenor.

"I don't know what to say," she went on. "It is a great temptation to have my child placed for ever above the reach of any trouble that poverty may bring—and I am not a rich woman, Sir Digby—and the greater portion of my income is an annuity that dies with me. But I am think

ing of you. Have you thought what it would be to place a helpless creature like my afflicted child at the head of your establishment to—

"I have thought of everything," he replied, gravely. "What does the establishment signify so we love each other; and I think, I fancy—"

"You have not said anything to her, Sir Digby! You have not told Beryl you love her! She knows nothing of such things as yet. She is as innocent as a child in all love matters. She has been as you see her for many years."

"So she told me. No, Mrs. Blount, I have not spoken to her of my love. I would not startle her sweet innocence by act or word till I had your consent to approach her. Say I may speak to her; let me feel that your blessing goes with my asking, and I shall be the happiest man in all the world."

"You must settle it with Beryl," Mrs. Blount said. "If she does not say you may it is not for me to stand in her light. But, oh! Sir Digby, if her misfortune should bring misfortune on others—if her children should be afflicted like herself—will you not curse me for having yielded to your wishes?"

"Never. Whatever comes of it, I shall thank Heaven for having given me such a blessing. Dear Mrs. Blount, where is she! May I go to her! I want to hear from her own lips that she will try to love me—that my happiness is not all a dream."

"You told him to settle it with Beryl, did you, mamma!" Miss Blount said to her mother, half an hour afterwards. "Beryl is disgustingly in love with him and the settlement will not take long. She will say, 'Yes, sir, and thank you for asking,' and be Lady Stretton. Fancy that! Lady Stretton, without the smallest notion of such a position means. Mamma, I am a blighted being; I think I shall turn Roman Catholic, and go into a convent."

"It may be of the greatest use to you, child," Mrs. Blount said. "Lady Stretton's sister will be a person of consequence."

"Not half so much as Lady Stretton herself, mamma. Don't imagine I am jealous of Beryl, poor dear. I wouldn't mind changing places with her, that is all, only I should have to shut my eyes every time Sir Digby came near me. Beryl can't see how ugly he is. I believe she thinks he is the handsomest man in the world."

"Let her think so, my dear," Mrs. Blount said. "She is nervously sensitive, blind though she is, about beauty, and it would give her a shock to tell her that her hero was not an Adonis. Here she comes—a transformed Beryl. My darling child, you look quite radiant."

"Oh! mamma, mamma!" was all Beryl could say, as she nestled into her mother's arms, and Mrs. Blount fondled her and held her close to her loving heart, and asked her what ailed her.

"Nothing, mamma. I am so happy, that is all. Mamma, he loves me—he says so. He has asked me to be his wife. I once heard a clergyman say that Heaven was all love; I know now it is true."

CHAPTER V.

THERE was a shadow over the great joy in Digby Stretton's heart—what it is there in this world that is not so overshadowed! It was nothing to do with his love; that was unalloyed and exulting as human love can possibly be; but with his brother. Hubert had been in a whirl of money difficulties and entanglements at the time of the accident which had well-nigh killed him, and he confided to his brother that if he didn't absent himself from the country for awhile he would most probably be arrested.

The money matter could be settled, and his brother resolved that it should be without troubling their mother. But there was disgrace attached to it; a scrape into which the handsome prodigal had got himself, and which, if he stayed in the country, would be inevitably exposed.

His illness formed a capital excuse for his leaving England for awhile, and Sir Digby

resolved to put a bold face on the matter, and get him away before anything like a shadow of the trouble he had brought about should fall on Stretton Royal.

"It shall be the last time, old fellow," the invalid said, as his brother held his wasted hand, and promised that he should be safe and at ease once more as regarded money within a week. "As I am a living man I will turn over a new leaf from this hour. You shall never have to sigh over me again, or, what is more, you shall never have to sheli out any more. The matter shall never shed another tear for me while I live."

"That's a brave Bertie," Sir Digby said. "I hope you will remember your promise when temptation comes, that is all. It is for the mother's sake I have done it this time. She loves you so dearly she would break her heart if anything happened to you."

"Or to you," Hubert said, gently. "She loves you just as well, old fellow."

"She shivers when she looks at me sometimes," Sir Digby said, with a smile. "I am not a son for any mother to be proud of. Ah! Bertie, the family honours should have been yours. You have the Stretton beauty and grace. I doubt I have done wrong sometimes."

"Ah, how!"

"In seeking to bring a wife to share my home. Maybe I am bringing a curse upon the old race. My children—"

"Look here," said Hubert, bringing his hand down on his brother's knee with a smack that made Sir Digby start and laugh, "you are getting into one of your old morbid fits. I thought they had flown away altogether, chased out of existence by your innamorata's bright smile and winning words. You are not a Gorgon, men, that you talk as if you ought to go about in a mask for fear of frightening people; and if you were, your pretty Beryl can't see it."

"No, thank Heaven for that," Sir Digby said. "There is something to be grateful for, after all. She cannot see it, bless her, and she does not know."

"Of course she does not. Who is going to tell her that her husband scarred his face when he was a baby, and behaves like a lunatic about it now he is a man? You will let me see her before I go, will you not? And look here, Digby—"

"Well, my boy, what is it?"

"You will not tell her what a scamp her brother-in-law is, will you? I shall be different when I come back, and she knows me. Don't rake up my transgressions for her benefit, there's a dear boy. I should like her to think well of me."

"She shall; the very best, be sure of that," Sir Digby said. "She shall never know but that her brother-in-law has been a model of propriety and prudence all his life. I shall bring her to see you to-day, so look your very best."

Hubert Stretton thought he had never seen anything so beautiful as the sweet, calm face of the blind girl who was to be his brother's wife, nor heard any music like her gentle voice. Digby left them for a few minutes after he had introduced his brother to Beryl and brought their hands together. Beryl liked to hold the hand of anyone to whom she was introduced. She was almost a thought-reverie, and she gleaned a great deal from contact with a hand.

"What is it?" she asked, suddenly, in the midst of their conversation on indifferent subjects; at least subjects with which they were both conversant.

"Nothing," he replied. "Why?"

"Something started into your mind all at once," she answered. "Your hand gave a throb."

"You are right," he said, looking at her with wonderful admiration, "something did come into my mind—a way to serve you."

"To serve me?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I cannot tell you now. I was looking at you, and I thought—Ah! there is Digby," he added, as his brother entered the room. "I have taken the greatest care of her, brother mine. But have you a care, too; she is a witch; she can read

men's thoughts through their hands, and guess their inmost minds from a touch."

"No she can't," Beryl said; and Lady Stretton coming in at the moment the subject was dropped, and, as far as Beryl was concerned, almost forgotten; and Bertie, the bright darling of them all, was now from suffering, and wasted to a shadow, went away, and was not among the pleasant company at his brother's wedding. He was gone to some celebrated German baths; but the name of the place was not mentioned, and Sir Digby looked rather grave when he came back from escorting him, after an absence of a few days, which had seemed like months to Beryl, to whom he had come to be all in all.

It was a very quiet wedding. No one wanted to make a display of the bride's infirmity, and they went to the little church just outside the Park gates, and took each other "for better for worse, for richer for poorer," with only their own immediate friends to witness their happiness.

There was no wedding tour. What need when the bride could not see and did not care for being seen?

It was a glorious honeymoon to her to come to her new home, and learn her way about, and familiarise herself with her fresh surroundings.

If Lady Stretton lamented in secret before the marriage over her son's choice, and bewailed to herself the introduction of a blind mistress to Stretton Royal, she soon forgot that she had ever objected, in the love that grew in her heart for her new daughter.

It did not seem as if Beryl were blind; she was so self-reliant and fearless. She soon learned to go about with only Lion for a guide, and it would have been bad for anyone to have laid a finger on her while the big dog was near.

And so two months of happiness went by—happiness such as Digby Stretton had never dreamed of—a very foretaste of Paradise, and then there came a shadow.

He never knew when it began. It was a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but it was there. Beryl had a secret—something that she was keeping from him.

She was as loving and gentle as ever, her face lighted up with all its old radiance when he came near her; but she had something in her mind which she did not share with him.

More than once he had surprised her in tears, and when he had questioned her, she had said nothing ailed her, and broken away from him to cry still more in her own room.

Once he had come upon her and Dormer busy over a letter. The woman was reading it to her, and her face was all one glow of eager expectation and delight.

There was no mistaking the expression, but the sound of his footstep changed it to unmistakable fear.

He asked Dormer about it, but that independent personage only replied that the letter was her lady's, and it was not for her to talk about it.

He asked Beryl herself, and she shirked the subject, and would not give him any straightforward answer; but she seemed frightened, and shrank from him when he would have drawn her close to him and talked to her gently and lovingly; and Digby, poor self-tormenting soul, took it into his head that she was weary of him and afraid of him, and all sorts of ridiculous notions, and brooded and bewailed himself, and behaved as jealous men will, and never sought counsel from any one, not even his mother. She loved Beryl so dearly, he said to himself, that it would never do to let her have even a suspicion that all was not right. They had been scarcely three months married when his suspicions were confirmed in such a fashion that he wished himself dead in his angry grief.

One morning the post brought to Stretton Royal two letters—that is, only two of which he took any cognizance. There was the usual amount of correspondence, business and otherwise, lady-like letters to his mother, and all sorts of missives for himself, as master of the house. One, a foreign-looking missive, was laid on his heap, and another, also foreign in appearance, was placed beside Beryl. Dormer was beside

her at the moment, and took the letter as a movement from her young mistress.

"You have made a mistake, Dormer, or, rather, the butler has," Sir Digby said. "That letter is for my mother."

"No, sir," she replied, "it is for my lady."

"I am going mad," Digby Stretton said to himself. "It was in Hubert's handwriting."

Beryl was strangely agitated at the receipt of that letter, whatever it contained, and that she knew something of what it was about was evident from her trembling hands and quivering lips. Yet she had not read it or heard it read, for it was in Dormer's pocket.

"Shall I not read your letter to you, darling?" her husband said presently, when Dormer had left the room for a minute, and a curious terror came into her face at his words.

"Not this one: oh! not this," she said, with a sort of gasp. "Any other but this one; don't ask me, dear, don't ask me!"

"I won't if you do not wish it," he said, gently, if somewhat coldly; "but it is hardly fair or politic to confide in a servant what you conceal from me, Beryl."

"Ah! you don't know—you don't know!" she said, the tears falling down her cheeks. "Trust me, Digby dear, and don't be angry with me for not telling you."

"Please yourself," he said. "I have no wish to pry into any secrets that you wish to keep;" and so saying he walked out of the room with his own letters in his hand, and shut himself in his study to read them.

The foreign one was a surprise and a shock. It told him of the death of a relation in the West Indies, and of his own accession to a considerable fortune. It would be well, the letter said, if Sir Digby Stretton could arrange to come out and see to the business himself. There was likely to be a claim set up by an illegitimate son of the deceased gentleman, and matters generally were at sixes and sevens.

"I cannot go," Digby said to himself. "How can I leave home and Beryl? and I could not take my darling with me. Where is she, I wonder?"

The news had almost driven the suspicious letter that Beryl had received out of his head.

He went to seek her, and came upon her unawares in a favourite nook of the private garden. Her attendant was with her, and they were talking earnestly with their heads together.

"I am quite ready," he heard Beryl say; "ready to go this very day. Oh! Dormer, if we could only get rid of Sir Digby, we would start at once."

Start. Where to? Where could his blind wife be wanting to go and without him? The two moved away as he watched, and left a torn piece of paper lying where they had been sitting. The Baronet took it up and his fears were confirmed; it was part of the envelope of the letter, and it was directed in his brother's handwriting. He had not been mistaken—he thought he knew Hubert's free, sprawling hand. What could he have to write to Beryl about?

"Dear Hubert!" The words came distinctly to his ear in his wife's voice, and then a warning, "Hush! my lady," from Dormer.

Ah! he would go to Jamaica—he was not wanted here. Fool that he had been to think that there was any chance of happiness for him. Even a woman who could not see turned against him. Only three months, and his happiness was over!

So he talked to himself, working himself up with every passing moment till he had built up a pile of jealousy and hurt feeling big enough to make him do anything.

"I shall go, mother," he said to the Dowager Lady Stretton, when he showed her the letter. "I don't fancy I shall be much missed."

"What do you mean?" she asked, coldly, as it seemed to him.

"I mean that I—that Beryl—that I don't think my wife will miss me much," he said, incoherently, and his mother smiled to herself, but answered him quietly and gently.

"I don't know what you have got into your head, Digby!" she said. "Beryl will grieve as

much as you could possibly desire at any separation from you."

"Yet she is anxious to get rid of me. I heard her say so."

"I think you may trust your wife in all things," Lady Stretton said. "Leave her to me, my boy. If you have any fancy regarding her shake it off; you will be sorry for it. Make up your mind when you will travel, and make haste back. The clouds will all be dissipated by the time you return, and you will wonder at yourself for ever having let them gather."

He thought his mother's manner rather odd, and he left her without telling her anything about the letter that had aroused his suspicions. She loved Hubert so dearly and he had repaid her so badly, in some instances, that he could not bear to give her pain.

"I will go," he said. "Perhaps I shall be drowned, killed, lost or something. If I am, there will be an end of it and of me. Oh! Beryl, my darling, my darling! I could have borne anything but this—anything but this!"

CHAPTER VI.

"DEAR HUBERT!"

How the words seemed to ring in Digby Stretton's ears as he sat communing with himself, and trying to take comfort from his mother's words!

He recalled everything that Hubert had said to him about his wife after that interview; how he had told him Beryl was an angel, and declared that he envied him his happiness; and he recollected now how Hubert had seen Beryl again.

Dormer had taken her to his room, and she had been there alone; he had not noticed or cared at the time. But now, what did it all mean?

They were in correspondence; and his wife blushed and was agitated at the mention of his careless brother's name. He had heard her with his own ears declare that she was ready to go—where?

She, who could not stir abroad without Dormer or someone with her—she wanted to get rid of him, wished he would go away that she, too, might go.

"Dear Hubert!"

How her voice had softened and taken a new and strange tenderness as she spoke the name, unconscious that her husband was within hearing.

Poor, passionate Sir Digby! Conscious of his own ugliness, and making sure that Beryl had found her mistake—had heard that her husband was almost a Gorgon—what should he do?

The very tone of her voice, as she spoke to him that morning, had been altered. It was petulant and impatient; and Dormer, too, had spoken to him with what seemed undisguised contempt, as she refused to give him the letter that had come for her mistress.

Beryl had admitted there was a secret, and he knew it was one that his brother shared with her—his younger brother, his mother's favourite, and the one who could always win a woman with his glib tongue, and sweet, wheedling ways.

How had he come between them? How had he managed to work upon his blind wife? That he had done so was only too apparent; and he, Digby Stretton, the master of this old place, and the richest man in all the country side, was the most miserable man in existence.

Common-sense whispered "Go and talk to Beryl, seek her and have an understanding with her, and above all, trust her;" but common-sense was rooted and sent to the wall by passionate jealousy and fancied hideousness and unworthiness, and was crowded out of court altogether.

A passionate, loving heart wrung by a slight, either real or imaginary, has no sense, and Digby Stretton heaved his misery, and hid it as the Spartan boy hid the fox, and smiled while it lacerated him.

Leave it to his mother! Ay, would he! He would go to Jamaica, and perchance never come back again. He was cowardly in his sorrow, and had not courage enough to grapple with the evil. He would tell Beryl he was going, and bid her

adieu, and leave the rest. A bitter cloud had come over his happiness; he could better bear the darkness if he were far away.

His wife was in her own room when he sought her, alone, her fingers straying idly over the keys of her piano. Music was at all times a solace and amusement to her.

She was singing softly to herself, and did not hear him enter—a rare thing for her—for her ears made up for her eyes, she was apt to say, and was singularly acute, as blind people's ears generally are.

It was not till he touched her shoulder that she was conscious of his presence, and she looked up at him with a puzzled expression.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"What should be the matter?" he said, gravely; "why do you ask?"

"There was no love in your touch," she said, gently. "Ah! Digby, you are angry with me, and I cannot help it."

"Yes, you can; you can tell me what it is that you are keeping secret from me. Why you have letters that I may not read!—letters from—"

He checked himself. He would not introduce Hubert's name now; he could not trust himself to speak of his brother yet.

"Yes, I did have a letter," Beryl said, quietly, and with a curious determination in her pretty face, "and I do refuse to tell you anything about it. My darling, can you not trust me?"

"I must, since you give me no alternative."

She had no idea of what his suspicions were; she could not read the distrust in his eyes, nor the wild look that came into his face at her words.

"As you will," he said, coldly, after a pause, during which she sat wondering why he did not speak to her. "You will not be tried with the effort of keeping anything from me long. I am going away."

"Going away?"

She echoed his words like someone in a dream, and her face turned very pale; but there was a look on it in the midst of her surprise of relief and satisfaction. She was glad he was going—he could see it, he was sure of it. His presence was irksome to her now, her fancy had faded. Ah, well! it was not her fault, maybe. It was the fortune of men like him never to be loved for themselves alone.

She had been told what a position hers would be if she married him, and—Bah! it would not bear thinking about. He would go and let the rest take care of itself. He should be able to think when he was away; he could only torment himself with rage and despair now that she was so near him.

"Yes," he said; "going away. You will not mind."

"Not mind? Oh, Digby! half myself will be gone if you leave me. But where are you going? and why? You did not tell me anything about it this morning."

"I only knew of the necessity this morning. I am going to Jamaica. I have inherited some property there, and I must go and see after it."

To Jamaica! And he could stand there and tell her of it in that cold, hard fashion, without taking her into his arms and kissing her, or telling her how sorry he was to go. Perhaps he was not sorry. Perhaps she had wearied him with her helplessness and childish ways. She was very childish—her sister was always telling her so.

"You are not sorry to go," she said. "I can hear that in your voice."

"It is better that I should do so," he replied.

"And you, Beryl, you can do without me. I think you are not sorry either. It will leave you free. I heard you say you wished it, only an hour ago—you were talking to Dormer."

Beryl was very white now. He was trying her too hard.

"Did you hear all I said to Dormer?" she asked. "Were you listening?"

"No, dear. What I heard was by chance. I heard my wife wish that she could get rid of me; she has her wish now. I shall go to-morrow if possible."

"And for how long? Ah! Digby, it is cruel to come and tell me this so suddenly. What shall I do without you?"

She broke down now and burst into passionate weeping, and he took her in his arms and held her close to him.

"You will be quite safe," he said. "You will have my mother, and your own mother and sister, and Dormer."

"But I shall not have you," she said, and then suddenly, after a pause, "how long shall you be away, Digby?"

"Three months, I daresay."

Again that curious look of satisfaction that he had marked in her face before. She could not conceal her feelings, and he could read her speaking face like a book. She was glad he was going. There was no doubt of it; she wanted to be free.

"Three months!" she exclaimed, "three whole months! Oh! Digby, it seems like an eternity."

"It will pass over," he replied, quietly; "an end will come to my absence and to all other things. Beryl, my darling, don't let me go thinking I have made a mistake and spoiled your life. Tell me what it is that you are keeping from me, and why you are glad that we are to be separated!"

"Spoiled my life!" she repeated. "Digby, are you going out of your senses? Life has been Heaven to me since I have been your wife till—"

Till what? She stopped suddenly, and her face whitened. Till someone came between them was the interpretation he put upon her words, and he hardened his heart, and spoke coldly enough in answering her.

"Only for a little while, I am afraid," he said. "Perhaps Heaven will come back when I am gone, Beryl!"

"I don't understand you," she said, her face flushing now, as his bitterness became apparent in his tone. "We are misunderstanding each other, I think."

"Perhaps we are. I think I understand myself if I do not my wife. I shall go to-morrow, if possible. Think if there is anything you want me to do or arrange for you before then. I should like to think I left you happy, Beryl, in case of anything happening to me."

"If anything happened to you, Digby, nothing in this world would make me happy; you know that," Beryl said. "I don't know what you have taken into your head concerning me; but whatever it is, if it is anything wrong I can give the lie to it with a fearless heart. I have never knowingly done anything to merit even your passing displeasure."

"Tell me what you are keeping from me, and I will believe you."

"I will not," she said, angrily, her temper roused now; and without another word she rose silently, and made her way out of the room.

And so these two, playing at cross-purposes, were to part for a long time. Digby Stretton was to cross the sea, maybe never to return, if winds and waves were adverse. And Beryl was to stay where she was, and grieve over his hardness and want of faith in her. It was her first sorrow, poor child, and one that she could not tell to anyone.

Digby doubted her. Digby suspected her of some wrong-doing. She could not see, poor child, that her own conduct had led to the suspicion, and that her husband's over-sensitiveness had made a mountain of it; and she let him go, knowing nothing of the tempest that was raging in his heart, and fancying that she had concealed from him the very thing that he had found out—that it was Hubert who shared her secret.

And the mischief grew and spread. A word let fall by Sir Digby in his agitation had been caught up by a servant, and, somehow, the rumour made its way through the house that Sir Digby was jealous of my lady. It found its way to Mrs. Blount's ears, who thereupon went to her daughter and demanded an explanation; but Beryl had none to give her. She was reserved and strange in her manner, and would not answer her mother's questions, and the Dowager had nothing to say upon the subject at all. She was quite sure that there was nothing of the sort, was all she deigned to say. She could trust her son, and she hoped

that Mrs. Blount had a sufficiently good opinion of her daughter to listen to no such nonsense.

"They must think what they please," she said to herself, after her interview with her son's mother-in-law. "I cannot meddle in it, I have given my word not to; they must take their own way."

Rumour does not stay at home when she has any business on hand. She flew far and wide with the mischief with which she was laden now—flew even to Jamaica, in a letter to a gentleman on a neighbouring estate to the one where Digby Stretton was setting things straight, and preparing to return home.

"The silly season has begun," the writer said, "and all sorts of gossip and scandal fill the papers as usual. Amongst other items I saw a paragraph hinting that something was wrong at Stretton Royal. Sir Digby is your next neighbour out yonder. A whisper is going about that his blind wife has left her home, with whom or for what is not stated. Anyway, she is not at her husband's country house, and the Dowager is in London alone. I hear she repudiates all knowledge of her daughter-in-law's whereabouts; but one never knows quite what to believe. Another on *dit* is that her younger son is coming back—he went away under a cloud some time since."

The letter was put into Sir Digby's hand to read. He had struck up an acquaintance with the gentleman on the next estate, and he thought he was doing right in letting him know what was being said about him and his during his absence.

"Of course it is not true," he said, "but you may be able to do something to stop such idle rumours. I suffered myself once grievously through being far away when an idle report got about concerning me, and if I had only been aware of it I could have explained everything satisfactorily."

"Thank you very much," the Baronet said. "No, it is not true. I must get back and set things straight, whatever has gone wrong, and I am afraid something has. It is not that."

And in his heart he believed that it was—he felt that the wicked tale was true. Beryl gone! Beryl not at home! Where could she be! But—bah! he must not think of it, he must keep his brain clear, and go home—go back to his desolate hearth, and bear his life hereafter as best he might.

He had not heard from his mother for a long time; doubtless she did not know how to write to him after such a misfortune had fallen upon them all.

(Continued on page 355.)

A PLAIN GIRL.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

THE wedding was a very grand affair, and took place on New Year's Eve in the little parish church. Uncle gave me away; Maggie, Mary, and Janie were my bridesmaids, and we went straight off from the church. There was no returning to the Castle, no *déjeuner*.

Mr. Jarvis was best man, and did not sign the register, which was perhaps just as well—as he would have seen that instead of Miss Dennis it was Miss Deane who had just been married.

Our unostentatious and very select party looked well—the girls in pretty dark dresses and velvet toques, that had come out of the thirty pounds I had received from my father.

They each wore a sable cape, George's gift. I insisted on something really useful, instead of the proverbial little ring or flimsy fan—and carried bouquets of crimson flowers, Mr. Jarvis's offering.

I myself was dressed in a tailor-made gown, one of Redfern's, with a little hat to match, and did not feel in the least as if I was going to be married when I put it on.

To the last I was arranging Mary's hat and hair, and I felt, until the brougham came for me

and I drove away in it alone with uncle, that up till this we had been preparing for some outing like the regimental sports.

The day favoured us; it was bright and sunny and frosty. The sun shone on the crystallised leaves and the red holly-berries and flimsy silver cobwebs that hung from tree to tree.

My heart beat very fast indeed as we drove up to the church door, and Mr. Jarvis, with a grin, handed me out.

I was going to be married this time, and no mistake. There was Mr. Vicars waiting within the communion rails, book in hand, and in another ten minutes the ring was on my finger, and I was Mrs. Karalsake.

We parted with all our friends at the porch—Janie and Maggie hugged me and shed tears over me—and I cried a little, too; but it was not quite certain what I was crying for, unless to keep them in countenance.

Mary (although my oldest friend) did not weep. I did not care for her half as much as for her sisters; she had imparted to me that I was so changed in appearance she would hardly have known me, and she also remarked rather fretfully that "I was always going to be married!"—this after she had made an exhaustive examination of my trousseau, and where I am afraid the poisonous cud of envy had begun to work upon her mind. Mary adored pretty dresses.

As we drove away from the gate *en route* to the station I noticed Tom Kelly, the stone-breaker, sitting on the wall adjoining the graveyard, goggles and all. As I bent forward, to make quite sure that it really was him and no other, he took off his battered old wide-awake, and waved it towards me with hearty good-will.

"There's that mad fellow!" said George, "that old stone-breaker. Who would think he had the sense to offer you his good wishes in that very enthusiastic fashion; and I suppose you don't even know him!"

"Oh, yes, I know him—only for him I would have been killed the day I was coming to the Bourkes."

"In short, on your other wedding-day; but now, were you nearly being killed, or do you mean kill?"

"A runaway horse in the post-car. I don't know what would have become of us, only he ran and grabbed at the creature's head, and stopped it for a second, and gave the driver time to jump off, and me too, as you may imagine."

"You never told me this before, Nellie. When we come back I must look up Mr. Kelly, and give him something substantial as the very least I can do."

"You had better not, mind. He would not take it. He is queer, you know—not like other people."

"But not so queer as to refuse a round sum of money, eh! He must be very mad, indeed, if he is so insensible to good coin of the realm."

We went to London, where I was formally introduced to my mother-in-law and my sister *ditto*. They received me pretty well—as well as I could expect—considering that the former knew all, and that the latter had always intended George to marry a most particular friend of her own, and I represented in my person a very great disappointment to one and a fearful shock to the other. Still I was a lady. I was inoffensive personally. I was George's choice, and they put up with me; but the week I spent in Grosvenor-street I was wretched—especially when George (happy man) went out to his club and I was left alone with them and their friends, who flocked in to afternoon tea, to be presented to the bride, and I felt that I was like some very superior kind of wax doll on show.

It was not so bad when George came in, and after dinner took me alone to the theatre, but the drives and visits and afternoon teas with Mrs. Karalsake, senior, and Miranda, were oppressive beyond measure. At last I struck, and I said quite plainly,—

"I always thought one's honeymoon was supposed to be something to look back on all one's life. I shall look back on mine with a vengeance. I hate it, George. Why did you bring me here? Your mother watches every word, every look, every gesture of mine. Your sister whispers

about me with her friends before my face. I heard her yesterday telling someone about Mr. Bellamy. I have always to be on my good behaviour and in my best clothes; and when you come in and venture to sit beside me and laugh, and whisper too, your mother looks poisoned daggers, as if it wasn't proper! I wish I was back at the Bourkes!—and I burst into tears.

"You are a little goose," he said; "but if it comes to that it is just as bad for me here as for you. Do you think I am not pretty sick of this state visit? But you see, my dearest girl, I am the only son. My mother, though her manners are not very pleasant, is very fond of me in her own way—and will be of you by-and-by. She thinks you lovely—a great admission on her part. It was necessary that you should be formally presented to what's called the 'connection,' and that our marriage should not be a kind of hole-and-corner business, and I had to bring you here to show that I was not ashamed of you—to let them see you with their own eyes, as none of my people were at the wedding; but now that you have run the gauntlet we will go away—to-morrow if you like. We will run over to Paris, and then down to Pau, and the Riviera. No need to shiver in England if we can help ourselves."

"And I need never come back here again? Promise me that, George," I said, standing up and laying my hand on his shoulder.

"Not unless you like," with a laugh.

"Like? I always heard people in law were disagreeable—now I know it. I don't understand how you can be so utterly different to yours—your mother with her formal ways, and calling me 'Mrs. Karslake,' and speaking of you as 'your husband,' and Miranda! The way she stares at me is positively insulting!"

George laughed again.

"You may laugh!" I cried, angrily—we were standing alone, looking out of the library window—"but you will just go and tell your mother that your wife is not disposed for an airing this morning—that you are going to take her for a walk in the park, and that we will not trespass on her kind—ah!—hospitality after to-morrow."

George ruffled up my fringe, and called me a regular little Tartar in private life; but he went all the same and did my bidding, and took me out for a nice long walk in the park, and then to a place where we had a charming luncheon, and then to an afternoon performance at one of the theatres.

I began to feel free and happy. I have no doubt that I looked very—ah! pretty, from the way people stared at me. Not in the style that Miranda did, as if I was some new species of animal, but with respectful admiration. I did not dislike it, but evidently George did, and muttered to me behind his programme,—

"If that fellow down in the stalls does not stop staring at you in that insolent manner I shall be obliged to go down and wring his neck."

How I laughed. George was going to be a jealous husband. I knew that, and it amused me immensely.

I was a child, as far as theatre-going was concerned, and gave myself up to the pleasures of the moment, and wept and all but screamed with laughter. George was both amazed and delighted, and said, as he looked at me in unutterable delight,—

"It is really as good as a play taking you to the theatre. Well, I wish I could enjoy all the jokes as you do. I would I were a child again."

"I suppose you've been often?" I asked, as I wiped my eyes and gasped for breath.

"Often! About every night of my life but Sundays, when I was in or near town."

"I should like to go every night of my life but Sundays, also—"

"No, no. You'd get pretty sick of it."

"Not I! Remember that I'm years younger than you. Let me see, George, you are close upon thirty, and I am not twenty. You have ten years' art. But who do I see in that stage-box, juggling his glasses over here? Oh! George, it's Mr. Bellamy!"

"So it is," he said, coolly, returning the stare with his own binoculars. "You need not be afraid of his coming over here and seizing on you. I declare, Nell, you look quite frightened! My dear child, how can you be so silly! Don't you think I am sufficient protection—or do you expect him to call me out?"

"Yes, you are sufficient," shrinking closer to him, "but the sight of Mr. Bellamy sitting there glaring at us has spoiled all my pleasure. I think I shall go away."

"No, no! If you do he will imagine that it is your guilty conscience"—smiling—"that you are unable to bear the remorse the very sight of him has awakened in your bosom. Come, now, Nell, don't be a silly girl! Don't think of him! Here is the curtain rising again, and this act is the best of all."

"I see one of our fellows down in the stalls. I'll beckon him up here, and then, really Nellie, with two soldiers to back you up, you may cast as many glances of defiance at old Bellamy as you choose."

"It's all very well for you to laugh, George, and—"

"Those laugh generally who win," he interrupted.

"But the very sight of his mere profile gives me a feeling as if cold water were running down my back. Recollect that I have never seen him nor he me since that terrible morning last June; and now when he sees me sitting here with you, and I suppose knows that I am married to you, you can imagine his feelings. I'm sure if he could he would murder me."

"I daresay his feelings are not so acute as you suspect. Now, I could behold Lily Norton with the utmost *sang froid*, take her in to dinner, and be perfectly polite to her as you please."

"Ah! but you are married—you are consoled."

"And you mean to imply that he is not! Vanity, thy name is Ellen Karslake! Hiss! I see young Curzon has caught my eye. He is one of our new boys. I have beckoned him up to present him to you, who have joined even later than he has. And now, for goodness sake, put old Bellamy out of your head, and let me see you laugh again."

I did laugh many times again, and I enjoyed the remainder of the piece—*The Colonel*—very much, and felt quite at home with Mr. Curzon, and that I now belonged to the regiment, as he and George talked shop about moves and steps and leave.

We underwent a solemn state dinner that night in Grosvenor-street, when I wore my cream evening dress in lieu of the orthodox wedding one, and was presented to half a dozen stout old ladies blazoning with diamonds, and half a dozen bald old gentlemen who knew George when he was a boy. There were a few younger people—friends of Miranda's—stiff, stuck-up specimens, and everything was grand and solemn.

How glad I should be to get away the next day, I thought, as I glanced along the tables and met George's eyes. This talk of the weather, politics and the electric light was very wearisome. How much nicer a snug little *steak à la d'inde* dinner (just our two selves), where I could laugh and talk as much as I liked, wear what I liked, get up and leave the table when I liked, and not feel that watchful eye of my mother-in-law's ever on me. She never seemed to tire of gazing at me with a basilisk stare.

In Paris George received a letter one morning that he hastily crumpled into his pocket after he had read it, and looked across rather guiltily at me. Now I had fully made up mind to read all his correspondence. Had he not established a right of way through mine, and perused Jane's and Maggie's, and Rosie Maxwell's effusions, and roared over them. So I said at once, very firmly,—

"What have you got there? If it's a *billet doux* be so good as to hand it over for my perusal."

"It's not a *billet doux*," helping himself to butter as he spoke.

"And it's not a bill," I said, "for it has a square envelope. Do let me see it! I know there's

something in it about me," holding out my hand, entreatingly.

"What put that idea into your head, Mrs. Vanity?"

"Never mind what. I know it is a right idea, and don't be so disagreeable, but let me see that letter."

I persisted, although he told me I had much better not, mind. But I would have my own way; so in the end, like an obedient husband, he handed it over—very reluctantly, I will say. It was from grandmamma, and ran as follows:

"DEAR CAPTAIN KARS LAKE,—I have not hitherto had leisure to reply to your note, in which you announced your intention of marrying my grand-daughter, Miss Dennis. I have waited to see if she really was serious this time, in case, as before, she might change her mind at the eleventh hour. She has not done so (unhappily for you), and is now your wife. All I can say is, that I am sorry for you! I know her, you do not! When all is going smoothly, to the outward eye, she is sure to be concocting some deadly act of deceit. She will one day play you a trick that will astonish you, but I cannot say that anything she would do would ever astonish me. She is a cold, calculating girl; in reality, that pretty, impulsive Irish manner, that charming frankness, is all assumed. I give you no dowry with her; you are a rich man, and don't need it. I give you what will be far more useful to you in the long run—good advice—a warning. I whisper into your ear the word 'Beware!' I know that the days of curses are gone, and that they proverbially come home to roost, but if any girl ever deserved to be laid under ban it's Ellen, your wife. I look into the future, and I tell you solemnly—and surely it will come true—that you will have bitter reason to rue—ay, to curse—the day you ever linked her fate with yours, and gave her the name of Karslake. She will surely disgrace it! You may think this the mauling of an angry old woman, furious at having her plans upset, her intelligence ridiculed by a girl of nineteen; but you will find in the long run that I am right. The mischief cannot be undone now, and what becomes of my grand-daughter is a matter of complete indifference to me—but I again repeat, in conclusion, that I am sorry for you!—Yours truly, "R. DENNIS."

"She does not take a very sanguine view of your chances of future happiness, does she, George?" I said, with twinkling eyes, as I came to the end of this unpleasant epistle.

"No; and I shall write her back a piece of my mind, that will astonish her!" he replied, in a very decided tone. "Why should she have it all her own way? That letter of hers is nothing more nor less than a mean, malicious, and deliberate libel! I won't put up with it! I shall give her a lesson to leave you and me alone."

"No, no, dear! You will not take any notice; it is beneath it," I said. "You must not be so vexed; she only wrote that to see if she could, as you would call it, 'draw' you. You must smooth that horrid frown off your forehead, and return to your expression of habitual calm, and I shall put grandmamma's nice affectionate character of me into the fire."

"No, don't do that, Nellie!" jumping up, as he spoke. "I shall keep it. I shall turn the edge of her own weapon against her yet, you will see."

I threw it over to him.

"Very well, then," I said. "Lock it up safely, since you value it so much."

Little did I guess, as he took it up and put it in the breast-pocket of his coat, that that very letter would prove a weapon in his hand against me one day!—that he would point to it as a strong testimony as a reliable witness against me.

It is well for us we are unable to look into the future. If we could, there are some of us would wish ourselves dead, ere we came to face what she and fate have stored up, in our coming days and years.

CHAPTER XXVII.

When we returned from leave we found that the regiment was on the point of being moved to England; so we joined it at Shorncliffe, and took a house, a charming little furnished one, below, in the town of Sandgate, and here I had the pleasure of keeping house, and being mistress of all I surveyed, for the first time.

We had a very comfortable ménage; there was George's man, a treasure of a soldier-servant, who could turn his hand to anything; there was my maid, who was on very friendly terms with the said Johnson; and we had a cook and housemaid beside.

Then the cobs and T-cart were mine now, and came round for my use every afternoon, and I used to go up to the camp, and take one of the other ladies of the 29th out, if George was on duty.

Of course, I saw a great deal of Mrs. Evans. She was quite an old friend, and the one or two other officers' wives were so nice that I soon began to feel quite at home in military life.

I looked on with the deepest interest at field-days, especially at the 29th, and most especially at George's troop. He looked quite too perfect, in my opinion, in full dress uniform, and riding his black charger.

I read over the orders, when George was out, made the acquaintance of most of the married women, and attended the sewing club, where my talent for cutting-out and working was a great acquisition.

We gave little dinners, very good little feasts. Our cook was a woman who knew what she was about, although her temper was "high," and I trembled before her. Johnson was quite an artist in the way of decorating a table. George was a capital host.

I will not say anything about myself; but I did my best, wore my prettiest frocks, sang my newest songs; and I have reason to believe that our entertainments were quoted most favourably in the invitation markets, and that it was said that "Jack" had done uncommonly well for himself. Of course, his name was not Jack at all.

We had some very charming evenings at home. We played chess or bésique, or I played the piano, and George smoked, or I worked, and he read aloud the latest novel. I was extremely happy—there was not one crumpled rose-leaf in my life. I had not a secret nor a thought from George (except one)—he was not merely my husband, he was my dearest friend.

For a whole six months not a cloud came over the sky, not a breeze, however gentle, ruffled the waters—the proverbial calm before the storm. I had heard nothing of my father, and seen nothing of Colonel Kant. He had been away on leave for months; now he was about to come back. What was I to do?—how could I always avoid him!

We had not forgotten Maggie and Janie. They spent six weeks with us in the summer, and came in for all the best polo matches, cricket, sports, and one or two dances, and enjoyed themselves immensely. I paid their travelling expenses, and gave them several pretty dresses—of course out of George's money, but what was his was mine now, and he was only too liberal, always saying,—

"Are you sure you have enough money? Don't you want some money?" so unlike husbands that we have all heard of! I used to exclaim at him sometimes and say,—

"What an extravagant wretch you must think me! Pray where did you get your idea of women's facility for spending cash? Remember I have been used to about sixpence a-week pocket-money."

"But if you had married old Bellamy you would not have been so economical, would you?" "No," I returned, violently; "I believe I would have ruined him just for sheer spite. Why," suddenly interrupting myself, "the house at the corner is taken at last. Money no object to whoever is going in there!"

"Oh, I believe the Colonel has taken it," said George, coming and looking over my shoulder.

"Not Colonel Kant?" I asked, aghast. "Who else? Pray is he not our respected commanding officer?"

"But—but he is not married, is he?"

"No."

"And what on earth does he want with a mansion like that—four huge sitting-rooms, nine bedrooms, rent forty a month?"

"Can't say, my love; but if you like I'll ask him!"

"Why can't he live in a tent?"

"I suppose because he thinks a house is more comfortable, and better calculated to keep out wind and rain, in which respect I thoroughly agree with him."

"I wish to goodness he had not decided to come and live so close to us," I said, turning away irritably.

"He is most anxious to see you, Nell. The fame of your charms has been noised abroad."

"He won't see me, then—if he called twenty times."

"Oh! I say, Nell!" he expostulated.

"No. I told you I would not meet him or know him, and I won't!" holding my chin very high.

"Remember, my prejudiced young friend, that if you are rude to him, and snub him, and shut the door in his face—and he will feel that, for he fancies himself a regular lady-killer—he will make me your scapegoat. He can make it very hot for me."

"I shall not be rude, but I shall not know him. I would not know him for anything. I have a reason—" and I stopped, and got uncomfortably red.

"Have you been hearing any—a—stories about him, for the ladies of the regiment?"

I had—ones that were not all to his credit. Here was a good opening to evade George's questions, so I replied by nodding my head very vigorously.

"What a strictly correct, proper matron she is!" said George, surveying me with ironical amusement. "Be as proper as you like, Nell, but for goodness sake don't let your zeal carry you too far—be prudent!"

I was very prudent. I gave directions to Johnson—the day I heard that my *bête noir* was coming—to say that I could see no one, that I was lying down with a bad headache—a dreadful tarradiddle. I was merely sitting in my own room, to be well out of the way, reading a book and sunning myself in a very delicious bay window.

Once we met him driving out. I beheld him afar off, and put up my parasol so that he could not see me. Another time we met him when we were walking in Folkestone, and I fled into a shop, leaving George to do manners and to talk to him outside! and there I stayed, buying all sorts of odds-and-ends that I did not want until he went away.

George expostulated with me *en route* home, but I said,—

"It's no use, George. I won't meet that man, and when I say I won't I really mean what I say! Now, don't be cross. The very look of his back gives me a feeling of such utter repulsion that it makes me feel almost sick—in short, Colonel Kant is to me what a cat is to Annie Evans. You know she cannot stay in the room with one, and if it comes near her she faints away."

I found a letter awaiting me when I got home, one I had expected for a good while. I knew it in an instant as I snatched it up from the saucer; it was from my father, and said,—

"DEAR NELLIE.—I am glad to hear you are well and happy, there is some satisfaction in that, but I am neither. My efforts have been all thrown away, also my time and money; there is nothing for it but to fall back on you, and see what effect you will have upon K—"

"I am sorry to bring you into the business and disturb you in your present lotus-eating life, but it is my only chance, and should you ever have children you will be glad some day that you did your best to clear your family name. It is hard to ask you to give your mind, and time, and energies, away from your doubtless very happy home and adoring husband; but your

mother and I were as happy once, and it is your duty, as her daughter and mine, to right me and to avenge her."

"I shall say no more, but to-morrow or next day I shall be in Sandgate, and will arrange to see you; meet you somewhere along the Hythe-road, when Karalake is captain of the day!"

"I hope you have never yet met K—face to face? If you have it would ruin all our plans."

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE FATHER."

So the momentous crisis was at hand when I was soon to test Colonel Kant's conscience by appearing before him as one from the dead.

My late happy, easy life was a bad apprenticeship for the task that was expected of me. My feelings on the point of the injustice done to my father, and all his sufferings, were not so keen as they had been—they were dulled by my own domestic happiness.

That was all brought home to me by the letter in my hand, and the words "Your mother and I were as happy once." My smouldering zeal kindled once more, and I felt ready, as I folded up the letter in my hand, to do or dare anything.

"Nellie, you look tired!" said George; "the walk has knocked you up. Let me get you a glass of sherry."

"No, no; I'm going to have my tea presently," taking off my hat and throwing it on the sofa. "It's rather warm, that's all. Don't be silly."

"You look as white as a ghost all the same. You're—hesitating—" have not had bad news in that letter, have you?"

"That letter!" scornfully. "What puts such an idea into your head? It's only a note from a tradesman," hurriedly tearing it up, lest he might ask to see it; "and now ring for tea, please, and open the window when you are up. The room is like an oven."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DAY or two after the receipt of that letter from my father I came suddenly face to face with him in the street—the one long, narrow, hot street that runs through Sandgate, and subsequently ascends to the downs.

I was walking with George, and, of course, took no notice; but I felt a good deal startled all the same, notwithstanding that this encounter was not quite unexpected.

No one would have possibly recognised in him Tom Kelly, the stone-breaker.

He was now dressed as a gentleman, and the change was wonderful. He was a very handsome man still.

His hair was quite grey, so was his moustache—he had a moustache now. His eyes were very dark, and sunken, and piercing, and were by far the most striking feature in his face.

They looked full into mine as we passed on the pavement, their glance speaking whole volumes of warning.

Although that glance was a mere flash, and did not occupy the fifth of a second, George noticed him, and said, in a puzzled tone,—

"I'm sure I know that fellow's face! Where have I seen him before?"

To this query I made no reply. I was not going to assist his memory.

The question seemed to exercise his brain to a considerable extent. He kept on saying to himself,—

"Where have I seen that face before?"

At length some fishing-tackle in a shop window distracted his attention. He stopped in front of it, and looked in. Then he went into the shop, leaving me outside.

Flies, and lines, and landing-nets were not interesting articles in my opinion; and, besides, my mind was very much absorbed in something quite different.

As I stood gazing abstractedly at the fly-books and fishing-rods some one—a man—came and looked into the window, too—some one in a light tweed overcoat, and pushed something quickly into my hand (a bit of paper), and said, in a low voice, "To-morrow," and then lounged on.

I wondered if George had noticed an aching for he was in the doorway. There was a look of mingled displeasure and astonishment in his eyes as they met mine. I felt scarlet with confusion, and tried to hide my flushed face behind my parasol.

"I say, Nellie," he asked, as he joined me, "did that fellow"—looking after my father—"speak to you?"

"Speak!" I stammered. "What on earth put such an idea into your head? Are people in the habit of speaking to strangers?"

"Can't say; but it seems like it. You must not be seen hanging about shop windows by yourself," he exclaimed, taking my hand and placing it on his arm.

It was the hand in which I held the scrap of paper, and, needless to add, kept my fingers tightly clenched in an almost vice-like grasp. If George were to see a bit of it sticking out, or if George were to read it, what a shame it seemed to have a secret from him!

I was torn between conflicting duties—my duty to my father and my duty to him; and what would he think if he knew that all my hopes and energies were bent on placing his commanding officer in the dock, to be tried for his life?

Little—little did he dream of the tragic thoughts that were covered by my pretty little brown straw bonnet.

We met another military married couple, which gave me an opportunity of secreting my *billet doux*, as we changed partners—I walking with the man and George with his wife.

I was exceedingly glad that she would not and could not find time to accept my pressing invitation to come in to five o'clock tea, for I wanted to be alone.

I rushed up to my room, the instant we got in, and tore open and devoured my little note. It said—

"DEAR NELLIE—Meet me at the second milestone on the Hythe road to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock. I have much to say to you. Do not fail me."

But how was I to contrive this, when to-morrow, as the day of our great regimental polo match up at the camp, I had been promising myself the pleasure of seeing George win?

He was captain of our team. We were to have a tent, and tea and ice, for the world and his wife; and, more than this, I had promised to drive two girls up there in the T-car, and chaperon them, though they were a good deal older than I was.

How on earth was I to get out of this? How—how? I leaned my elbows on my dressing-table, and asked myself this very embarrassing question. As I did so George looked in, and said—

"Hullo, Nell; tea is ready, and I want a cup before I go up to camp. You have not got a headache, have you?" anxiously coming over and laying his hand on my shoulder.

"Yes, a terrible one; but I'll come down. Tea will do me good," rising with simulated languor.

"You walked too far in the sun—that was it. You must not let it happen again," lifting my face by placing his hand under my chin, and looking tenderly into it.

I tried to meet his honest gaze without blushing, but I did not quite succeed. I had told him an untruth, and was rather a new hand at the business.

I had no more a headache than he had, but I saw that in feigning temporary illness lay my only chance for to-morrow.

Poor George! How utterly he believed in me! I felt a wicked, most deceitful girl as he led me downstairs, insinuated on my lying on the sofa, carefully lowered the blinds, put a soft cushion under my head, and poured out and brought me my tea.

Next day I was no better, of course—if anything, rather worse, and unable to rise from my bed, and George was full of anxiety and solicitude.

The Miss Trotters received a note (penned by him) putting them off, and he even went so far as to suggest that he should stay at home with me, and that a deputy captain might be found for the polo match. This was not to be thought of, naturally.

"As if anyone could take your place, George!" I cried, impressively. "What nonsense! Think of the folly of disappointing the whole team simply because I happen to have a bad headache! It's really only a headache. I have often had worse. You must go!"

My whole scheme, I told myself with great trepidation, would fall to the ground there and then if he did not. My feigned headache, my enforced absence from the polo, and my several stories would all be thrown away.

At half past two o'clock he bade me a tender and lingering farewell, and, mounting his hack, galloped off to the scene of the polo match; and as I heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs turning the corner of our street, or terrace, I sat up—quite myself, of course—rang the bell, and informed my maid that I really felt so much better that I would get up and dress.

I was not long over my toilet. It was a good two miles' walk to the place of rendezvous, and along a hot, dusty road. Dusty! It was so thick that it was like walking on flour.

A little after three I started, thickly veiled, garbed in my very coolest cotton dress, and carrying my largest parasol.

Oh, dear me! what a hot walk it was! and how nervous I was lest passers-by in hansom or victorias en route to the polo on the camp heights—how terrible it would be if they were to recognise Mrs. Karalake trudging along in the heat and amid volumes of dust, alone on the Hythe-road, deliberately turning her back upon the game at which her husband's play was one of the chief attractions.

My heart beat uncommonly fast as I recognised people, who luckily did not recognise me.

At last I reached the goal, and found my father there waiting for me. He praised my punctuality, and said,—

"You look hot and tired, Nellie. I'm sorry I've brought you so far, but it was safer. Come along into this cool, narrow lane; there's a log you can sit and rest on, and meanwhile listen to me while I talk to you very seriously."

"Oh, if you knew all the awful stories I had to tell," I said, fanning myself with my handkerchief, "about getting away. It seems so strange, so unfair not to tell George. Father, you must let me tell George," I said, entreatingly. "Do, please, let him into the secret."

"Tell him, if you like, but it will be fatal to my plans; and in the case of your repeating one single word of what you know you and I part for ever. I may find someone else who will be guided by what I wish—what I know will lead to success—silence. Of course I may not find such a person; the chances are that, when my only child goes against me, a stranger will do the same."

His voice as he spoke was hard and bitter, and cut me to the heart. I could scarcely keep back my tears.

"Father," I exclaimed, "would you not trust George?"

"I now trust no one. I've had a lesson for life; I am an experienced man. I know the worth of friends. Who stuck to me when I was down!—not one; and now that I have a chance—a small one, but still a chance—of eventually vindicating my good name, and of proving my innocence, my own daughter would thrust it aside for the mere sentimental consideration of unbecomingly herself to a man called George—a brother officer of the very wretch whom I would hound down."

"Do you think he would stand by, for the mere credit of his corps—you little—little know how strong is that in every soldier's breast, it was once in mine—and not lift a finger as he saw you figuratively put a rope round his commanding officer's neck and drag him to the gallows? No; if you can't keep your word and be silent you may go; I have no need of you," standing up, and waving his hand towards the entrance to

the lane, as if he were bowing me out of a room. I gave in. What else could I do?

"Of course, if it must be so it must," I returned, faintly; "but my husband is always first with me, remember."

I was standing as I spoke, and I trembled so violently that I was obliged to lean against a tree whilst I endeavoured to recover composure.

"He was not always first. At one time—not so long ago—he was nothing to you. I am—*et*; and, putting me aside, does the brand or name that still lies on your maiden name bring no blush to your brow?"

"My name is his now," I answered, in a low voice.

My father was about to make an angry interruption, but I made a gesture to restrain him, and went on,—

"I will do all I can—all you wish. I can say no more. Half measures in such a case are useless. You may make use of me as you will, do with me what you please, but don't keep me long in suspense. I am a bad actress, and whatever part I am to play, believe me, father, for your sake, I will do my very best, and enter into it with all my heart. Let me play it soon."

"That's the very thing I want you to do. There is not a day to lose. Any moment Kant may find out who you are—may be introduced to you as Mrs. Karalake—so there is every reason to strike quickly—I may say, at once. Are you prepared for this?" surveying me keenly.

"Quite," was my laconic reply.

"And your nerve will not fail you at the eleventh hour?"

"No," I answered, firmly.

"Humph! I'm glad you are so certain of yourself. I see, you have the Deane spirit. And now I will tell you my plan. You are to appear quite unexpectedly before Kant; you are to display to him the proofs of his guilt—the coat, the little book—and, unless I am much mistaken, he will be so completely overwhelmed that he will make a full and free confession—he will play our game; he will be so horrified and so shaken that he will place himself in our power; he will jump at the conclusion that the law has him at last."

"But how and when am I to see him?" I asked.

"Oh! leave all that to me. I'll arrange every detail when all is ready. I shall summon you at the eleventh hour, so that you may have no opportunity for tremors; and I rely on you to obey that summons without delay, demur, or question."

"You may rely on me," I said, rising as I spoke. "And, now, if you have no more to say at present, I must be getting back. George thinks I am in bed. You cannot think how I have had to tell stories and manœuvres to get here at all and I do so hate deceiving him! I feel so mean—so small."

"If all goes well the day will soon come when I can go openly to your house, and claim you as my daughter Nellie; and you will not then grudge the little subterfuges and white lies you have told to bring about such a result. I shall walk back part of the way with you—as far, at any rate, as I dare."

And he did accompany me a good portion of the way along that flat, hot, white road.

Oh! how thankful I was to get into my own cool little drawing-room once more! I glanced at the clock, as I threw myself into the nearest chair. It was nearly six. Another moment I heard quick steps running up the stairs; the door was thrown open, and George came in in full polo costume—scarlet and white striped coat, leather boots, and red cap.

"So I hear you are up!" he said, eagerly. "I ran home to tell you that we had won. But," surveying me in astonishment, when his eyes had become accustomed to the darkened room (for the blinds had been lowered to keep out the blazing afternoon sun), "you don't mean to tell me, Nell, that you have been out?"

"Yes, I—I—thought as my head was better that a little fresh air, a short stroll, would do me good."

"A little fresh air! You look as if you had been for miles. A short stroll!" his eyes sud-



"YOUR HUSBAND WAS NOT ALWAYS FIRST. AT ONE TIME HE WAS NOTHING TO YOU," SAID MY FATHER

denly fastening on my unlucky shoes, which were fully displayed, and as white as any miller's. "Fred Bingham told me that he had seen you walking along the Hythe road, a couple of miles out, in all the heat of the sun. I told Fred that his eyes had played him false for once in his life, as to my certain knowledge you happened to be in bed with a splitting headache, and that you were awfully cut up at missing the polo match. But, perhaps, I was wrong and Fred was right?" he asked, rather imperiously; and drawing himself up to his full height he seemed to be waiting for some reply, and for a few seconds I could not think of an appropriate one.

I stammered and coloured, and at last muttered something "about having walked on further than I intended."

"If you wanted air and exercise why did you not have out the cobs and drive out to see the match?" he asked, indignantly.

But again silence fell between us; this time a painful silence. I could find nothing to say. I was tired, hot, frightened, and cross. I merely took off my hat, threw it over on a sofa, and pushed my hand up through my curly fringe, and stared at George vacantly.

"I believe," said George at last, "that you had a reason for your walk that you are afraid to reveal to me. What was it?" turning on me a face as white as death.

"George!" I said, suddenly starting up and putting both my hands on his shoulders, "it is not possible—not possible that you should be jealous, and angry, and look at me like this. Just because I was so dull here all by myself, and yet not inclined for the bother of dressing and driving up there and talking to people, and went for a turn along the Hythe road by myself, you become quite tragic and demand—the reason! Now, George, dear," looking up in his rather stern face with a smile, for I could not bear him to be angry with me, "is it not all very silly? Are you not glad that no one heard you?"

"You are a rare special pleader, Nell, that I

will say; and you certainly make it sound silly enough," stooping and kissing me as he spoke; "but, on the other hand hear my side of the story. You profess to be wild to see me lead our polo team to victory. You have rather more interest in the match than most—have hardly missed a day's practice—and when, to-day of all days, I leave you in bed, apparently half dead with a headache, and heart-broken with disappointment, I go reluctantly up to the match; and after the first goal has been taken a fellow comes up and tells me he has seen you two miles out in the Hythe road in all the dust—and I promptly snub him for his pains."

"But alone, jealous George—walking alone!"

"Yes; but my clever Nellie, you might have been going to meet someone;" but he says this in jest, and pinches my cheek as he makes the suggestion.

"And you won, of course!" I exclaimed, anxious to turn the conversation into any other channel.

"We did; but not so much of course, madam. We had a regular tussle, I can tell you, and only won by a goal. It was awfully exciting—it was so close. I wish you had been there. Landsell and Carew played up well."

"And who carried the ball in between the flags, and carried the team to victory?"

"I did, I believe," he answered, modestly; "but it was all luck. I raced Hackett for the ball, and my pony, Fireworks, had the legs of his; so I just got hold of the ball and raced in. There was great cheering, and I'm glad we won. I came straight off to tell you. I did not even wait for a peg. Annie Evans is coming down to see you to-morrow morning, and she is in an awful way for fear you won't be able to go to our ball on Wednesday; but you will, won't you?"

"Of course. I'm quite well," I answered, promptly.

"Set up by that walk of yours!" still harking back to that unlucky discovery. "Don't

pretend you have a headache on Wednesday, whatever you do, and go out for a solitary stroll, for you have to receive all the guests, and that is a serious business before you, Mrs. K."

"I—I receive the guests!"

"Yes. Annie is not going—mourning, you know; and I'm next senior married officer. You will be hostess. Won't you be proud?"

"But you will be the host!"

"No—Colonel Kant will be that, of course; and, by-the-bye, I hear that he is very seedy. He was not up there this afternoon, for a wonder, and generally he is in his element doing the agreeable to all the ladies."

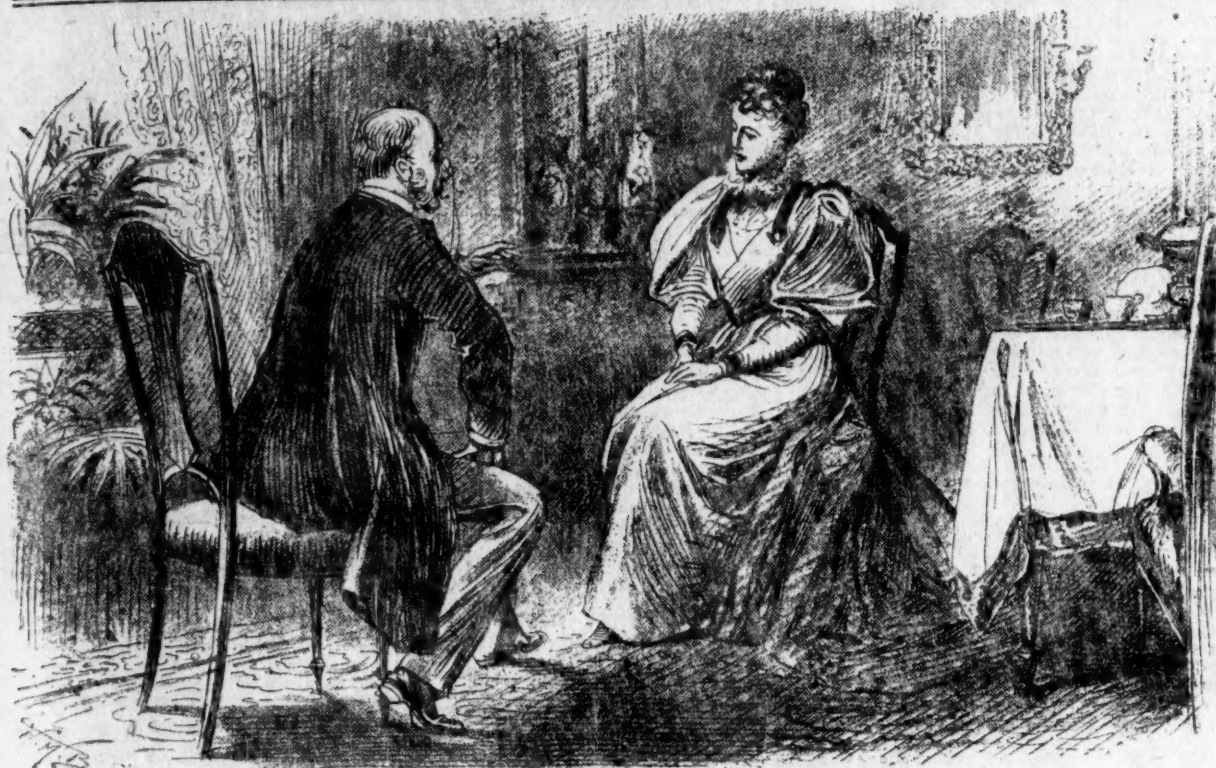
"What a cruel misfortune for all the ladies!" I remarked, contemptuously. "I'm sure it spoiled their afternoon."

"They will see him, and he will see you, on Wednesday night," returned George, with an encouraging nod.

"Yes, I suppose there's no help for it," I returned, moodily; and here the entrance of James, with my very late afternoon tea, put an end to the present conversation.

(To be continued)

THE opinion has prevailed among scientists that the viper which resists inoculations of its own venom was exempt because it was accustomed to the poison. They have found that the blood contains the same poisonous qualities as the venom itself, and from this drew the conclusion. But it has been discovered that in addition to the poison the blood contains another substance that neutralises the toxic principle. To ascertain the effects of heat upon the poison, a portion of viper's blood was heated to 538 C., and maintained at this temperature for a quarter of an hour. Guinea pigs inoculated with this blood not only did not die but were proof against inoculation of fresh blood, which would, if at first employed, cause instant death.



LORD KINGSLEY BEGGED VIOLA NOT TO ACCEPT ANY MATRIMONIAL OFFER THAT MIGHT BE MADE TO HER.

LORD KINGSLEY'S HEIR.

—201—

CHAPTER V.

THEY stood looking at each other, the two girls whose fate was so widely different. The beautiful, tenderly-cherished daughter of Lady Ashlyn, and the hapless girl, who, through no fault of her own, had such a shadow over her good name that her mother had shut her doors against her, and in her stern code of morals had left the poor child at the world's cruel mercy.

Viola Orme was inexpressibly touched at Janet's story. All her sympathies were with the lonely girl; but, at the same time, she was conscious of two other distinct feelings. She was almost shocked at herself that this story of Will Thorndale's misdeeds did not surprise her, and she was unutterably relieved that here was a tangible excuse for refusing his suit when the proposal she dreaded arrived.

It was strange that she should accept Janet's story so implicitly that she should need no proof to convince her of Will's villainy, for she and Lord Kingsley's heir had known each other intimately since their childhood, and for old acquaintance sake she ought to have been loth to believe ill of him; but still Viola's one feeling was that this thing must be true because it was so like Will to oppress a creature weaker than himself.

Janet Ingleby, meanwhile, stood watching Viola as a criminal awaiting his doom. To poor Janet Miss Orme seemed like a being from another world. She was almost amazed at her own audacity in expecting such a dazzling vision to listen to her story.

The minutes seemed like ages to Janet in her agony of distress; but really Lady Viola spoke very quickly. The pause she made was of the briefest, and she made it to gain time to choose her words, not because she was in the least doubtful about her answer.

"You need have no fear of my marrying Mr. Thorndale," she said, very gently, "you have

been misinformed. We are not engaged; and, after what you have told me never shall be, of that you may be quite sure."

There came a wonderful look of relief into the sweet brown eyes which were raised imploringly to Viola's face.

"You are not angry with me for coming. I know it was presumption; but Will is all I have in the world. I could not give him up."

"Sit down," said Viola, gravely, "I want to speak to you very seriously, as if I were your sister or an old friend. It is quite true that I shall never marry William Thorndale. I never wished to be his wife, and there is no engagement between us though through being family connections we have been intimate for years. You need not look on me as a rival, Miss Ingleby, try and believe I want to help you when I say you must not trust William Thorndale, he is a bad man."

Janet shivered.

He was very kind to me before my illness. I was pretty then, and I am sure he cared for me."

"I have no doubt he cared for you, but not enough to marry you. William Thorndale has not a penny of his own. All he has in the world depends on his uncle's favour. I know Lord Kingsley well (he married my aunt), and I am sure he would be very angry if Will married you. Do you think Will loves you well enough to brave his uncle's displeasure for your sake?"

Janet Ingleby flinched; but she would not say a word in disparagement of her idol.

"We need not be married openly," she said, slowly, "so that I was his wife and nothing could part us I should not mind."

"You wrong yourself," said Viola, impatiently. A modern girl to her finger-tips, with all the modern ideas of woman's equality if not superiority of sex, this other girl's patient abnegation angered her. "Do you suppose if William does not care for you now enough to face a few disagreeables for your sake he would be ready to acknowledge you later on?"

"Lord Kingsley's power over him cannot last for ever," pleaded Janet, "and when you are

married, and he knows Will could not win you, perhaps—"

But Viola interrupted her.

"Please leave my marriage out of the question, it is the most improbable of events. I grant Lord Kingsley has no real authority over his nephew, and that Will must be his heir eventually, however much they disagree; but my uncle is not an old man, and enjoys the best of health. He may live twenty or thirty years, and so long as he is alive he can keep William Thorndale out of every penny of the property. You might keep your marriage secret for twelve months, but you would grow very weary if you had to conceal it for twelve years."

The tears rolled slowly down Janet's cheeks.

"I ought not to have come here. No wonder you are angry!"

"I am not angry. I only want to save you from making your life miserable. Look here, Miss Ingleby, let me help you. I have plenty of pocket-money, and you can take help of that sort better from a woman than a man. Let me give you enough to take you to the seaside. Don't let Will have your address. If he thinks he has lost you he will be more constant. Then when you are strong and well again my mother shall try and find you a situation, and in time, when they see you supporting yourself honestly and honourably your own people will be glad to come round and make friends."

"And you would do all that for me?"

"I would do it gladly; there need be no delay. I can give you the money now, if you will promise me to go to the sea to-morrow."

Janet Ingleby was silent; beautiful and fascinating as was Viola Orme, the girl she was ready to help so generously did not quite trust her. To Janet's narrow prejudices, Lady Viola was still her rival.

Brought up to regard the class above her as her natural enemies, the girl was not quite sure she offered kindness was not a sort of trap laid for her feet. Lady Viola wanted to get her safely out of the way while she and Will arranged

their marriage. When Janet pronounced herself "well" and ready for a situation, she would find her lover a married man.

"Won't you let me help you?" pleaded Viola. The girl shook her head.

"I think your money would choke me," she said, bitterly. "It would seem to me the purchase-money paid for giving up Will."

Lady Viola lost her temper.

"If you disbelieve my word, pray do not trouble me any longer. I have told you Mr. Thorndale is not my lover. What more do you want?"

"You have promised me not to marry him yourself," said Janet, feverishly, "but yet you want me to break with him, that is why I do not trust you."

Lady Viola looked at her half pityingly, half contemptuously; strong herself, she could not understand the weakness of Janet Ingleby.

"It matters nothing to me whether you break with Mr. Thorndale or not. After what you have told me of his treatment of you, if you have a grain of womanly pride, I can't make out your ever consenting to see him again. But I do not want you to break with him, it is no concern of mine. Marry him if you like, and let him break your heart."

Janet burst out crying. She was weak still from illness, and weary from grief.

"You have my address," said Lady Viola in a gentler tone; "if ever you need help my purse is open to you; but don't come here again unless you have given up Mr. Thorndale, for I warn you if you continue your friendship for him and he breaks your heart, I shall think you have only yourself to blame, for you cannot say I have not warned you."

Janet had risen to go, but she turned pleadingly to Viola.

"You won't tell Lord Kingsley?" she implored, "it would anger him so with poor Will if you told him about me."

"You need have no fear," said Viola, coldly.

She felt relieved when Janet Ingleby left her. She pitied the girl, but had no patience with her infatuation for Will. Viola was so strong and self-reliant she could not understand the other girl's weaker character. She felt quite certain there would be a reconciliation, temporary or otherwise, between Janet and her lover, and wondered whether the Marquis would discover his heir's escapade.

It was characteristic of Viola that she said not a word to her mother about her strange visitor. She would gladly have banished Janet Ingleby from her own thoughts, but that was impossible. The girl's face haunted her, and once or twice she found herself regretting she had spoken with even a seeming of sternness to the lonely little creature.

"You must have overtired yourself at the Academy, dear," said Lady Ashlyn, when the dessert being on the table, the servants departed.

"I am not in the least tired, mamma; what made you think so?"

"If you are not tired your brains are wandering. I have spoken to you three times without getting an answer."

"I am dreadfully sorry."

"It is not worth so much regret," said the Countess, smiling. "Pray are you repenting of your unkindness to poor Will?"

"Not in the least, and, besides, I wasn't unkind—they want him in Cadogan-place and we don't, unless—and she smiled, "you hanker after his society, mother mine."

Lady Ashlyn shook her head.

"I am quite contented with yours. I am afraid I am a very jealous woman, Viola, I like to have you all to myself sometimes."

"And I should like to give up the rest of the season, and go home to Eastcliff to-morrow."

Eastcliff was a very pretty house on Lord Kingsley's estate which Lady Ashlyn had rented ever since her widowhood, partly to be near her sister, partly because she liked to feel she had a country home.

"And leave all your admirers desolate," said the Countess, laughing. "Since when have you tired of the world, Vi?"

Viola blushed crimson.

"I am not tired of it, but I hate London and fashionable society."

"Then you ought to have dined in Cadogan-place to-night and met the Talbots. They have been away from England for over twenty years, and your Aunt Jessy says it is quite refreshing to hear their abomination of everything new, while Mr. Talbot and your uncle talk for hours over their young days. They were schoolfellows, you know."

"I don't think Aunt Jessy would care for them. She likes fashionable people—and Will."

"The Countess laughed outright.

"Well, you know, Viola, a great many other people do too. Will is really very popular about town."

"Do you like him, mother?"

Pressed into a corner Lady Ashlyn found it difficult to reply; but her answer when it came was a model of diplomacy.

"I think much better of Will than you do; but I will confess it hurts me sometimes to see him in the place of my sister's child. With such a property at stake it is cruelly hard she should have had no son."

"You are quite an unfortunate."

"No; because I have my tall girl, and I would not change her for half-a-dozen sons."

Lady Ashlyn and Viola were sitting over their breakfast the next morning, when Lord Kingsley was announced. A visit from him at that hour was so unusual that the Countess was dismayed, and began eagerly to inquire for her sister.

"Jessy is perfectly well, never better. She wants you both to come round to lunch. I am just off for a few days at the sea."

Sister-in-law and niece alike stared at him. A few days at the sea when Parliament was sitting, and the Marquis clearly loved his place among the hereditary legislators of the Upper House. Lord Kingsley at the sea in June, and his wife at home! Why it sounded impossible.

"Why doesn't Jessy go with you?" demanded the Countess.

"Well, as I am only going at Talbot's request I never thought of her joining us. He is a bachelor *pro tem*, and wanted me to go away with him while his wife pays visits. Jessy has a heap of engagements this week, so she won't have time to miss us."

"And where are you going?" asked Viola, trying hard to think of a seaside place not quite empty in June.

"Oh, Ventnor. Talbot settled that."

"Ventnor!" exclaimed the Countess. "Why that's a winter place where consumptive people go to die."

"No, to be cured mother," contradicted Viola, while the Marquis laughed till he nearly cried, "and uncle is not consumptive."

"You will be baked," said Lady Ashlyn. "Why can't you persuade Mr. Talbot to go somewhere else? Eastbourne would be far better."

"No, we've fixed on Ventnor, and Ventnor it must be," replied the Marquis. "I shall not be gone long. Look after Jessy while I'm away."

Had he looked in merely to say that? Viola had a fixed idea there was some more serious object for his visit. Lady Ashlyn left the room to look for a book she wanted him to take to her sister, and the Marquis drew his chair a little nearer to his niece.

"Do you know I am your guardian, Viola?"

"Why, of course I do," she answered, frankly. "Mother has told me over and over again that I can't marry without your consent till I come of age; but I am in no hurry to change my condition, so it doesn't trouble me."

"I want you to do me a favour," began the Marquis.

"Oh, dear," sighed Viola, "he's going to begin pleading Will's cause."

But he was not. In a very few words Lord Kingsley begged her not to accept any matrimonial offer that might be made to her until his own return to London.

"At latest I shall be back in a week," he concluded.

"My dear uncle, have fifty brilliant knights announced their intention of proposing to me

directly your back is turned, that you want such a mysterious pledge!"

Lord Kingsley shook his head.

"I can give you no reason for my request; but I make it in sober earnest. I believe a considerable danger threatens you. It can be averted by this simple means. Promise me not to accept anyone at your husband's until my return. Surely you have sufficient faith in me to know I have a strong motive for asking such a thing."

Viola got up and put her arms round his neck.

"Of course I have," she said, kissing him, "and I promise what you ask most faithfully. To tell you the truth, I am rather glad, for the only person likely to propose to me is one I want to say 'No,' to, and if my ambitious mother scolds me I can lay the blame on you."

And, oddly enough, Lord Kingsley took his departure on the instant, without even waiting for the book Lady Ashlyn had gone to find; indeed, he had come only to secure that pledge from Viola.

CHAPTER VI.

THE girl whose bright face suddenly appeared in Mrs. Thorn's kitchen was a very great favourite with the gentle housemistress. Poor Mary Thorn never could quite understand why Alice Dale was so much gentler than her own daughter, seeing that her mother and Silas Thorn were brother and sister.

True Kate Thorn was thought to have done well for herself when she married. Her husband was "something in the City," and when he died he left her ample to live on in a quiet way, so that Alice Dale, her only child, was regarded as something of an heiress.

"What are you and Ronald talking about, Aunt Mary?" Alice asked, quietly; "do you know I knocked twice and you never heard me?"

"We weren't quarrelling," said Ronald, smiling. "I believe I was telling mother I should enlist soon if nothing turned up, and she was warning me I should repent it."

Alice sat down by the window and looked reproachfully at Ronald. Mrs. Thorn bustled about now to make up for lost time, and after a few kindly inquiries about her sister-in-law's health she left Alice to her son's care.

"If you went away it would just break your mother's heart," said Alice, indignantly; "don't you know she is wrapped up in you?"

"She would have the others."

"But they are all girls," demurred Alice, "and somehow they are all a little hard. I always feel ready to pitch into them, when I see how they treat Aunt Mary. I did tell Larry one day she ought to be ashamed of herself."

"What did she say?"

"I quite forgot." Alice drew her chair a little nearer Ronald; "don't you want to know what brought me over here this morning? I've left mother up to her eyes in work, but I would come over without waiting for anything."

Mrs. Dale had a large house on Camberwell-green, and took lodgers. She did not actually need to increase her income, but she was an active, energetic woman, and enjoyed plenty of occupation. She kept two servants, and her apartments were of a really superior class.

Ronald smiled mischievously.

"Has the 'drawing room' proposed to you, Alice? I always predict you will end by marrying one of the lodgers, you know."

"The 'drawing room,' as you call him, is turned sixty, and far too sensible to think of matrimony at his time of life; but my news has to do with him. He's going away next week."

"You are sure to get another lodger soon," said Ronald, a little bitterly. "I notice in this world, Alice, people generally do get things when it doesn't matter much to them whether they do or not."

"Now, don't be cynical. Mr. Grey is a dear old man and very clever; he belongs to I don't know how many learned societies, and he never would have come to lodge in such a place as Camberwell only he lived there when he was a boy, and

has a kind of sentimental affection for his birth-place. But let me get to the point: He's going abroad for several months, and he wants a companion, some one who can speak French, and who knows shorthand; mother and I thought of you directly."

A strange hope flashed into Ronald's eyes, then, too soon it faded.

"My French would not be good enough. I used to do all the foreign correspondence at the office; but I never spoke to a French person in my life."

Alice looked ready to cry.

"Ronald, you are too provoking. I've trudged all this way in the baking sun because I thought this situation would suit you down to the ground, and Mr. Grey has promised mother to see you before he advertises, and now you won't try for it."

"Don't be vexed, Alice," said Ronald, touched by her interest in him, "of course I'll try for it. I'll come back with you now and interview Mr. Grey at once if he's in; only, Alice, I have had so many disappointments lately you can't wonder that I don't feel very hopeful."

"Mother said it would be a good thing for you to go abroad even for a few months; that you'd get a better situation afterwards, and you know a companionship is quite genteel."

"Quite," said Ronald, cheerfully.

They told Mrs. Thorn of the project, and then they started for Camberwell-green, Ronald's thoughts still busy with the story of his mother's first marriage, Alice wondering if he got the situation whether it would bring her any nearer the summit of her ambition—her cousin's love.

No one knew her secret, though her astute mother may have suspected it; but Alice Dale loved Ronald with all the devotion of her woman's heart; even as a child she had preferred him to any of his sisters, and later she had grieved terribly over his lack of prospect, which alone she believed kept him silent.

"Shall you be sorry to go away, Ronald?"

"No; most thankful. Ramsden-road never seems really to be my home, Alice; your uncle detests me, and shows it."

"He can't really detest his own son," said Alice, "and you mustn't worry about it, Ronald. Mother says Uncle Silas always was cantankerous, even as a boy. She often wonders how anyone as nice as Aunt Mary ever came to marry him."

"Your mother is not a bit like him."

"Not a scrap. Mother is a dear!"

And Mrs. Dale quite deserved her daughter's praise. A buxom, comely woman, with a great gift for making those around her comfortable, she had not the gentleness and refinement of Mrs. Thorn, but she was the very essence of kindness and good nature. Someone who knew both her and her brother Silas, declared she must have absorbed all the sweetness of the family, and left only vinegar for him.

"That's right, Ronald!" she said, heartily. "You're just in time; another half-hour and Mr. Grey would have started for London. Go up and see him now. Then you must have a bit of dinner with Alice and me, for it's much too hot to tramp back to Ramsden-road."

Ronald had seen Mrs. Dale's drawing-room before, but not in Mr. Grey's tenancy. He thought he had never seen so many books collected in any one room, and that the old man, with his long, white beard looked the very type of a scholar.

"Ah! Mr. Thorn," he said, pleasantly, "sit down and let us have a little talk. Your cousin thinks you might be of some use to me. Now, shall I tell you first what I want, or will you tell me what you can do?"

"I would rather hear your requirements first," and Ronald spoke far more eagerly than he would have done before, for he had taken a great fancy to the old man. "I only hope I may be able to fulfil them."

"Well, I want someone who can read aloud, without murdering the Queen's English, and who can write a decent letter; someone who will copy whole pages of my rather crabbed writing, and take down notes in shorthand. He must know enough French and Latin to understand the quotations generally used. I don't mind whether

he calls himself my secretary or companion. My life is given up to books, and very dry books some of them are. My friends have been wanting me to engage an assistant for years, but I kept putting it off; now," and his voice took a ring of sadness, "my sight is becoming impaired, so I must delay no longer."

"I could do all the things you have named, sir," said Ronald, "and I love books better than anything in the world; but I have no experience of a secretary's work. I have been a clerk ever since I left school."

At Mr. Grey's request, he read a page of a scientific book aloud and wrote a letter at the old scholar's dictation.

"Now," he asked abruptly, "I hear you live at Peckham, and have never been away from your parents. Are you likely to be homesick if you go with me to Paris?"

Ronald shook his head.

"I am so little likely to be homesick, sir, that I have been told if I do not find a situation in a few weeks I must go away; my father does not care where, so long as he has not the expense of keeping me."

Mr. Grey betrayed no surprise.

"In that case he is not likely to object to your leaving England?"

"Not in the least."

"You are a strange fellow," said Mr. Grey, slowly. "You haven't asked me how long I shall want you, or how much I shall pay you."

"I suppose because I am pretty well desperate," said Ronald, dejectedly. "I assure you I made up my mind this morning to enlist, if nothing better turned up soon."

"Well, I will give you a hundred a year, and pay your hotel expenses. If I don't keep you six months, I will see you are no loser."

Ronald stared at him.

"It is far above my market value, sir," he said, bluntly. "I had thirty shillings a week in my last situation, and found myself in everything."

Mr. Grey smiled.

"I am a rich man, Mr. Thorn, and, being alone in the world, I can afford to please myself. I have taken a fancy to you. You are not in the least what I expected. Mrs. Dale and her daughter called you 'poor Ronald,' so peremptorily that I was prepared for a thin, emaciated youth with a hectic face and a churchyard cough. Will you meet me at Victoria-station, Monday evening, in time for the boat-train? Don't bring too much luggage, they charge atrociously for it in France."

"Well," said Mrs. Dale, when Ronald entered her parlour, "what luck? Will he think of it?"

"It's settled; I am to go to Paris with them on Monday, and, Alice, I owe it all to you."

"Well, it would be strange if I didn't do my best for my own cousin," returned the girl cheerfully; "but I suppose I may confess the truth now. I was in a awful fright that you wouldn't be learned enough to please him."

"Have you known him long?" asked Ronald.

"He has been here about six months; at first I thought he was poor (he spends very little on himself) but when I saw the people who came to see him, and the presents they sent him, I began to understand, and an old servant who came once when he was out told me his history. His wife died within a year of their wedding, and he has cared for nothing but books ever since. He is rich enough to rent half a dozen houses and keep carriages and horses, but he has never really settled down anywhere since she died."

"How did he hear of your apartments?"

"He saw the card in the window and called to ask the terms. I like Mr. Grey very much; he gives far less trouble than some poverty-stricken curates."

They dined together off roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, Mrs. Dale helping Ronald with a liberal hand; she really admired her nephew extremely. She had lost sight of her brother during the first years of her married life, and had not the faintest idea that Ronald was not his own son.

She provided some port wine in honour of his recent birthday, and insisted that his health should be drunk though it was a day after the

fair, and then she told him she hoped he wouldn't pick up foreign ways but would remember he was a true-born Briton.

"I shall never forget that, or your kindness either, Aunt Kate," said Ronald, warmly; "you'll let Alice go and see mother pretty often, won't you? I know she'll miss me at first; you see I'm her only son."

"I'll do what I can to cheer up Mary," agreed Mrs. Dale; "but, poor thing, she never had much spirit, and Silas is a handful for any woman to manage."

And Ronald said never a word of yesterday and his visit to the Academy; Alice Dale watching anxiously for one word of love, one little sign that she was more to him than a cousin, never dreamed that if her hopes had been possible yesterday, the meeting with Lady Viola Orme had driven them now to take their place among life's might-have-beens.

It was late in the afternoon when Ronald reached home. Mr. Thorn had come in to tea, and there was a goodly number round the table. The young man addressed himself to his step-father,—

"I'm off on Monday," he said, shortly.

"Where to—ruin?" demanded the preacher.

"The road there's getting crowded."

"To Paris, as companion and secretary to a gentleman."

"Paris is a modern Babylon," said Silas, plausibly; "take care that you escape from it with your soul alive. You'd far better have applied for the vacant place at our desk."

"The pay is better," said Ronald, shortly.

"A hundred a year and my board; as soon as I get my first month's salary I'll send you what I owe."

Mr. Grey had said "don't bring much luggage," but everything Ronald possessed in the world went into one shabby portmanteau, and that without crowding.

His mother helped him pack, and cried bitterly. Poor woman, she was not selfish, and she was thankful her son had got any sort of situation, but she looked ahead, poor thing, and knew quite well Ronald would never return to Ramsden-road as to a home.

He might come and spend an hour with her now and then, but he would never be all her own again. Very soon there would be none of his belongings left in the shabby house, and oh! how she would miss him!

"You are satisfied," she asked, wistfully, "you think you will like Mr. Grey?"

"Yes, mother dear, he is a gentleman. I think that being with him will help me to be more like my own father must have been."

"And later on you will go to your uncle?"

"If I get on; if ever a day comes that I am earning my own living as a gentleman and need nothing at his hands then I shall ask you for his address and see if he has a welcome for his brother's son."

"I wanted to give you something to take away," said Mrs. Thorn, tearfully, "but I have no few things you would prize. At last I thought of this it was taken from your father's dead finger, and in all my trials I would never part with it—let me see if it fits you."

She slipped it on to his little finger, a signet ring of rich dead gold, with a crest engraved on it, and the motto, "Not the last."

It fitted the finger as though it had been made for it.

"I shall treasure it for my father's sake and yours," said Ronald. "Mother, darling, if ever I get on in the world I will repay all your love has done for me."

She shook her head.

"No, dear, our ways must part company now. I am Silas Thorn's wife, the mother of his children. I must keep as I am, a plain working woman, but you may become one of earth's great ones. You won't forget your mother. You won't be ashamed of her; but things can never be the same again. You will never be quite my own as you have been till now."

Silas Thorn's farewell to Ronald was characteristic of the man.

"So your mother has told you the truth at last. Well, I did my duty by you, but it went

against the grain. No one cares to provide for another man's child, and then Mary was foolishly fond of you; if I had not put my foot down you'd have been spoiled.

"I hope you'll get on in the world. I hear you no ill-will; but I believe myself you're too proud and worldly ever to be of much account."

Ronald walked away from the little house carrying his portmanteau. There was no *clat* about his departure. He might have been coming back the next day for all that was evident to the neighbours.

His mother stood at the open door and watched him till he was out of sight, then she went back into the house and cried till she had no more tears left—after the way of mothers.

Ronald travelled by rail from Peckham-rye to Victoria, and wondered just a little on the way what he should do if Mr. Grey failed him; but this was an idle fear; the old scholar was waiting in the booking-office, and greeted him very kindly.

"There's heaps of time. Come and have a snack before we start."

They had cold ham and chicken at a marble-topped table, and Mr. Grey called for a bottle of champagne.

"We must drink success to our acquaintance," he said, kindly; "and look here, Thorn. I'm a crabbed old fellow in a good many ways, but I want you to remember one thing. I really wish you to be comfortable and happy. I fancy you've had rather a hard time of it, young man, and I should like to make things brighter for you."

They were off.

Ronald Thorn's longest previous journey had been to Margate (by excursion train); but a taste for travelling must have been in his blood, for his spirits rose with every mile they traversed, and when they went on board the steamer at Dover, and a thin streak of water divided them from Old England, he felt as if he had already put his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder of success.

"Where did you get your name?" Mr. Grey asked him suddenly, when they had been some hours in the train, and were nearing Paris.

"I never heard," said Ronald, with a pained recollection that as yet he did not even know his surname; "but I believe it was a fancy of my mother's. I never met anyone else called Ronald."

"I know one man of that name, a first rate fellow, too; some of these days you'll meet him, perhaps."

They put up at a quiet hotel near the Champs Elysees, and in a week Ronald knew that his lines had indeed fallen in pleasant places, for Mr. Grey was more like a generous uncle than an employer.

He allowed Ronald to spend some hours of each day in reading and writing for him, but in the rest he insisted on the young man's amusing himself and seeing the sights of Paris.

"You are young enough to enjoy them," he said, frankly. "When I leave France I shall go to a dull country village, and you will find time there very heavy on your hands, amuse yourself while you can."

Though nominally Mr. Grey's secretary, Ronald rarely saw the gentleman that received letters; the old man preferred to read them himself, and unless they bore on his work, seldom mentioned their contents; but one day he departed from this custom, and asked pleasantly—

"Shall I show you the loveliest woman in London? Look at this photograph. It only came this morning."

But even Mr. Grey was not prepared for the effect of the likeness of his secretary. Ronald gazed at it as though he could never gaze enough, and returned it to the old man with visible reluctance.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"I think that Lady Viola is the loveliest woman in the world!"

Mr. Grey stared.

"How did you know her name?"

"I have seen her once. Oh!" colouring hotly, "I don't mean that I met her in society

as an equal. I was in the Academy, and I heard someone point her out to a friend. That's all."

"And you have remembered her face ever since?"

"It would not be easy to forget it."

"Well, she's a dear girl," said Mr. Grey, smiling, "but a very wilful one. She's been out two seasons and has had more offers than I can count, but she has refused them all. She declares she shall never marry anyone, and that marriage without love is a farce. A young lady of very wrong opinions you see."

"I thought she was engaged."

"Who to?"

"I don't know his name. There was a man with her, and I thought from his manner he was her lover."

"Very probably he wished to be," said Mr. Grey. "Viola Orme has the gift of making every man who comes near her seem her lover. It's not that she's a flirt or a coquette. Her beauty just bowls them over."

"I don't wonder."

Mr. Grey dropped the conversation, for the letter which had come with Viola's photograph puzzled him not a little. The life-long friend of the last Lord Ashlyn, he was Lady Viola's godfather and guardian, so the Countess frequently consulted him about her daughter.

"This season has been most disappointing," wrote the Countess. "At the beginning of May I felt certain Viola would marry William Thorndale, and that I should see her Marchioness of Kingsley before I died. Now she seems to have taken a dislike to poor Will and treats him—I must say it—abominably. Kingsley, instead of sympathizing with me, actually turns round and says he would rather the match did not come off at present. It used to be his one desire! He is most silent and mysterious, and I really begin to fear if he encourages Viola in her wilfulness she will end by being an old maid."

"Happier so than married to a schemer like William Thorndale," thought Mr. Grey; but he could hardly say this to his correspondent. He had left Paris by this time and was established at Dieppe for sea breezes. It struck him that he might invite Lady Ashlyn and her rebellious daughter to be his guests, and sent off a request for their society, but the Countess declined.

"It is most kind of you," she wrote, "but we must go to Kingsley and try to console poor Jessy. What has happened to her husband I don't know, but he seems as restless as a troubled spirit, and has made no less than six trips from home in the last two months. He is grave and troubled and altogether I feel most anxious about him. By the way he asked me for your address, so perhaps he is coming over to confide in you."

And the very day of the letter Lord Kingsley arrived, walked sharply into Mr. Grey's private room, and putting out his hand, exclaimed,—

"I am in a peck of trouble, old friend, and I want you to help me."

(To be continued.)

AMONG the Chinese peasants, where wild cats, rats, and puppies are used for meat, care is exercised in preserving every part of the animals. The cats are stripped of their furry coat, and this, having a commercial value, is sold. Then the tender parts of the animals, the steaks and chops, are broiled as delicious tit-bits. The tough quarters are merely boiled down for the greasy material that comes from them. This is then used for flavouring the rice and vegetable dishes. Good venison is obtained in China, but few of the native cooks know how to prepare it. It is generally chopped up into fine pieces, and then cooked to death with a big dish of garlic, onions or rice. In such a mixture of odorous articles, the sweet, juicy, delicious flavour of the venison is lost, and, for all that the stranger knows, he is eating cat's meat or mice.

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THE DOCTOR'S SECRET.

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CHAPTER LXL.—(continued.)

"SEE here, you torment of my life, this is a new trick you're trying to play on me, eh? Flirting with boys you meet! I saw you fling off your old apron, throw it away as if it cost nothing, and give him a flower to pin on his coat. If ever you repeat that silly flirtin' business again, I'll give you a first-class hiding on the spot, before the young fellow's face. D'ye hear?"

"Yes," moaned the frightened child, picking up the dust-covered flowers with a feeble effort, and looking about her in undisguised bewilderment.

For a moment or two no one else appeared in sight, and Minna took faint courage and asked, hesitatingly,—

"Mrs. Lawson, have—have—we—much further to go? I—I—feel a little bit faint and tired. May I stop and rest a minute or two, please?"

"Stuff and nonsense! You're only lazy, that's all under the sun that ails you, you good-for-nothin' minx. Come, hurry up to the next person coming. You'll have to have better luck, or you'll neither be able to stop for rest or have a bite of supper. We'll keep a goin'. You 'tend to your beggin' till midnight—our time is our own—an' by that time we'll have the price of somethin' to eat, and a bed of straw p'raps to rest on."

The child did not think she could travel very much further; but she felt too tired to speak, even if she had had the courage to do so.

"Wait a bit," interposed the unfeeling woman, "you're shiverin', pretendin' you're cold-like. Here, thrust your arms into this other old gingham pinafore I was lucky enough to bring along. It's full of holes, but not quite so ragged as t'other one was. Suppose you try and freshen up a bit first by goin' to the nearest house an' askin' 'em for a drink o' cold water, then you fetch me out another!"

"I would be so glad to," murmured the child, moistening her dry, parched lips in feverish anticipation.

There was a house not more than a dozen yards away, and thither they bent their steps, stopping at the gate, which they entered, and going slowly to the rear entrance, rang the servants' bell. A man-servant appeared, and learning their errand, shut the door in their faces, calling from within that they must leave the premises or the dog would be set upon them. There was no choice for the two wanderers but to obey, and they turned their backs on the place and walked nimbly—for them—on to the next stopping-place, which was a little way from where they had met with the harsh rebuff.

Minna was faint-hearted, but the woman made her rally and beg for water. This time she was more successful, and after drinking two glasses of water each, they went wearily on their way, the woman thrusting the child ahead whenever she caught sight of anyone coming, and hiding in her ears.—

"Be spy, and beg hard, or I wouldn't give much for your life!"

But charity seemed slow in coming, despite the child's earnest appeals, and for the next two hours she did not realise more than sixpence from a few kind-hearted people.

As dusk crept up and night fell about them, those whom Minna approached looked upon her suspiciously, thinking she might be a trained beggar. More than one intimated this, and that if she had no home she should be looked up in the police-station.

Mrs. Lawson was easily frightened, and after searching she found a pile of lumber in an isolated place. She and Minna threw their tired bodies down on the rude planks, hidden from view, without a morsel of food for the child's supper or a drink for her feverish lips.

CHAPTER LXII.

How the hapless wanderers passed the long hours on their hard bed neither of them remembered afterward.

When the grey dawn came a stifled moan, that was half-pain and half fright, broke from little Minna's lips. It aroused the woman from her sluggish slumber, and with every bone in her body aching from contact with the hard boards she slowly rose to a sitting position, resting her shaggy head on her elbow, and called out, hoarsely,—

"What in the dickens are you trying to wake me for, right at the break o' day, you meddling imp! You do nothin' but whimper, and try to make other's lives as miserable as your'n."

"I—I want a drink of water, please, and I'm so faint and hungry."

"You had better say you want a good whippin'. That's what you're needing most of anything, and you'll get it presently, if you keep on with your extravagant wiles. Don't think ye can come any of yer put-up games on me. You've some object whenever you speak to me. You tire me out. An old woman like me toadying to yer whims and fancies and made a laughin'-stock of by a girl like you."

"Water, I—I am so thirsty," repeated the child, irritably.

"Want to put me to my wit's ends, ah! Where's there any water near here, I'd like to know!"

A deep-drawn sigh from the child's lips was her only answer.

A notion came to Mrs. Lawson, who felt an unquenchable thirst herself just then. She had packed among her things a wide-mouthed empty milk-bottle, intending, as soon as she could afford it, to treat herself to an appetizing beverage; but the girl had not brought her in enough money to indulge her taste.

She espied a sleek-looking cow grazing in the grass beyond. It was a most unusual thought for her, but she conceived the idea that it would be a smart thing to milk the animal, and secure milk enough to last them part of the day.

She put the thought into immediate execution, and soon she had the satisfaction of returning to the sorely distressed child with a half bottle of fresh milk.

At the same instant a bakery waggon rolled along. Mrs. Lawson hailed the driver, and haggling over the price of half a dozen rolls, she gave him three pence for them, declaring that amount to be all the money she had on earth, and hiding four, she gave two to the half-famished, wretched child, who devoured them eagerly and drained the half bottle of milk.

This refreshed her, as the woman had expected, and a few minutes later she dragged the sorely afflicted child out of her reading-place and harshly commanded her to get ready to attend to business. There was no one to comb or brush out the tangled, shiny locks of hair that hung round Minna's unwashed little face.

"Come, put wings to your feet," cried the shrill voice of the woman, breaking in upon her day-dreams in her rough way. "I'll give you just five minutes to get out o' here. If you don't cover the ground lively to-day, we won't have as good a bed to rest ourselves on to-night, I'll warrant."

Minna collected her scattered senses together, and rubbing warmth into her little bare feet, she trudged along, watching longingly for the next pedestrian, and inwardly praying to Heaven to let her run across Mona or some good, kind person who would rescue her from this awful life she was leading, and from this cruel, wicked woman who was persecuting her.

So intent was the little martyr with her own thoughts that she had almost forgotten her mission, when a group of strange men came walking rapidly toward her, laughing and boldly bantering one another as she advanced.

They took up the whole pavement, leaving no room for her to pass. There was nothing for her to do but to stand there, hold out her hand to each of them, and beg for pence.

This she did, repeating her story over again, at

their request, at least half a dozen times, until her tongue refused to speak.

She found that there was only one of their number who could speak and understand the English language, and she knew that he was telling his companions in his own tongue of the sad tale, and that they were all laughing amusedly over something he was adding.

One of the number of workmen—for she could see that they were on their way to their places of labour in the early morn—more bold than his mates, stepped forward, and lifting her in his arms, attempted to kiss her hot little face.

Minna struggled to escape from his clutches, calling piteously to Mrs. Lawson for assistance.

The woman heard her cries, but seeing that she had encountered a gang of men whom she would not be safe in opposing, she made up her mind that it would be unsafe for her to respond to the child's cries, so she fled precipitately down the street in the opposite direction, entered the first area-way that proved a safe shelter for a time, and never once leaving her retreat to see what had become of the helpless girl whose cries still rang in her ears.

A moment later she peered out in fear. Quick, light footsteps were rapidly approaching where she stood. No doubt it was one of the men who had separated from the others.

She strained her ears to listen. Someone was passing just opposite her. She looked up, and to her surprise she saw, coming limping toward her, none other than Minna, her face scratched, her hair dishevelled, and a look of the most terrible fear blanching her white, pained little face.

"Oh, why did you not come to my rescue! Those men almost scared me to death. A gentleman crossed over from an adjoining house, and shouted at those rough fellows, who ran off as soon as they discovered him. I went the opposite way. I did not know that you were here, till I passed by and saw you. Oh, I think I shall drop down dead, Mrs. Lawson, if I ever have to speak to such wicked men again."

The two walked away together, and finding streets that were more thickly peopled with the better class, she made the child pursue her vociferous snow, threatening and scolding her by turns until her head began to swim and her sensitive nature to inwardly revolt. Minna's only hope was that some charitable person would soon cross her path and rescue her, and she looked feverishly forward for that time to come.

The noon-day sun shone hot and blistering upon her bare head, sunburnt hands, and blistered feet, that were dust-covered and sore. Her walk was a painful limp; she could scarcely hold the pennies in her tired, cramped hand, while Mrs. Lawson, who came up to her as soon as the charity-givers had disappeared from sight, never once offered her another roll, or found a cooling drink of water for her parched lips.

The noon hour came; there was no one in the streets. One o'clock sounded from some factory tower in the neighbourhood. Minna had met with very bad luck during that whole hour—had not realised five-pence in all—and Mrs. Lawson, after assuring herself that no one was in sight to witness her villainous conduct, shook and beat the helpless child until she reeled and fell to the ground, and made no effort to rise from the spot where she had fallen.

"Get up, I say!" cried the irate woman, bending menacingly over her. "Go at your business, again, or by the old Harry! I'll cripple you for life; then you'll have need to beg, and you won't be acting in this vixenish way. It won't be long before darkness comes on us, then where am I to sleep! What have you earned to keep me and pay me for all the pains I've taken in looking after you!"

Minna's head drooped lower and lower; she was crying convulsively, her body heaving with emotion, her strength fast waning under the terrible strain that had passed over her. All that the woman could do had no power to make the weak, half-starved girl rise.

While she was in this dilemma a man was passing by with a kindly faced, elderly woman leaning upon his arm. Seeing the child in distress, they both spoke pityingly to her. Minna did not

raise her swollen face nor speak to them, and Mrs. Lawson's chagrin was great at the opportunity "the hated vixen" had lost by not telling them her story or even glancing up at them.

"Poor, sweet dear! she's crying herself sick over some little loss, or because she has been denied something she has set her heart on, no doubt," said the lady, gently. "See, she has neither hat nor shoes, and such awful shabby clothes. Gordon, my son, can you spare some change for me to give her!"

Doctor Forbes took but a hasty glance at the child; but his mother's words aroused his generosity at once. Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew forth two half crowns and gave them to her.

Mrs. Forbes bowed low over the half-hidden face, and with a soothing word she dropped the silver into the trembling little thin hand, and they went on their way silently. Another moment, and they were lost to sight.

Dazed as the girl was, the kind words of the lady fell upon her ears, and by a great effort she raised her head and looked after them. A glad light came into her eyes, and a low, smothered cry escaped her lips.

Heaven had sent them in answer to her prayers. The voice was so familiar to her, so much like Mrs. Moore's, and, oh! there was no mistaking Doctor Forbes, her kind benefactor! She sat up, bright with interest now, not even heeding Mrs. Lawson's rude grasp, as she gleefully clutched the money.

This large sum changed the woman's temper, and she condescended to help the girl to rise, and to find a seat for her, where she could rest her swollen feet and aching limbs.

She had given her a harder beating than she had intended, and finding her of more value than she had thought, she made amends by buying a pint of milk from a passing milk-cart, which she gave her, together with two rolls which she had left.

Minna devoured them ravenously, her hunger still unappeased.

"Beg a little more of the next one, and by-and-by we'll get some meat to eat, and a few potatoes," urged the woman.

Minna added a few more pennies to the woman's pocket, and they started to walk a mile or more to the nearest restaurant, leaving the aristocratic vicinity behind them. Minna took a long, earnest look at the street: she was leaving. It was near there that Doctor Forbes must live, she thought. The child had a remarkable memory. At the first chance, she made up her mind that she would find that locality, go from house to house until she found Doctor Forbes, and then he would be sure to find Mona for her.

CHAPTER LXIII.

Mrs. LAWSON and Minna made their weary way from one end of the city to the other, and finding themselves too exhausted to go further, they saw, to their great relief, a cheap-looking coffee-house just ahead of them.

"Great Scott! we've found the right place at last!" exclaimed the woman, mopping the perspiration from her red face; and planting her clumsy form in the door-way she motioned the lagging child to follow.

The man behind the counter looked at the poorly dressed, shabby creatures as the woman gave an order for some roast meat and a couple of potatoes to be brought on right away.

"That will be a shilling," said the waiter, eyeing the slim, torn purse suspiciously before he fulfilled the order.

"Well!" she answered, scornfully, "you s'pose I don't know yer prices!"

By this time Mrs. Lawson had got thoroughly "warmed up," and her tongue ran glibly from one topic to another.

Minna looked up at her with wide-opened eyes. A faint colour rose to her childish face, and her eyes drooped as the woman's laughter resounded harshly and shrilly.

"He—the man has gone," piped the childish voice.

Looking over her shoulder, the woman saw him laughing and talking at the little window with the cook, who had just thrust her order upon the greasy, unwashed tray.

"Sorry I couldn't serve you a larger order, lady," said the obsequious waiter, bowing politely before her as he laid the plates for the two, and mentally wondering whether or not he could flatter the slovenly woman into a tip for himself.

"Of course, if I wasn't in a hurry I'd give you a bigger order," assented Mrs. Lawson, grimly, and all unmindful of the glasses of water and napkins which he spread before them, and the fan which he laid at her side, he saw her turn to the dishes before her, put a small portion on the child's plate, and eat ravenously without stopping to say another word to any one.

Minna drew a long breath of relief when she had finished her share. She hardly looked like the same child who had entered the place, half starved and wretched in body, a little while before.

"Good, is it, eh? But don't you forget what you've got to do to pay for this treat. I'm a poor woman, an' every penny that you take off o' me you must earn treble to pay me back—understand!" said the woman, grudgingly.

"Ye-es," murmured the child, sorrowfully, the large, watery eyes that were raised eagerly to hers for a moment cast down, a blush of pain on the childish features. The little one was lost in deep thought for a moment after, then, clearing her throat she ventured to say in a low voice: "If—I—I had better clothes, I could serve in one of the big shops, and make more money for you than by—begging."

"What put that in your head? Let well alone," the woman answered, scornfully. "Why, there are millions of pretty girls waitin' for just such places, an' can't get 'em, let alone a homely creature like you settin' yourself up to compete with the likes o' them. Only real ladies get those places—not beggars."

Minna had been using the woman's fan to cool her hot brow, but at those words the fan ceased to move in her shrunken hands, her face grew white, then crimson, her eyes stared into vacancy, then fixed themselves on the woman's sneering face as her remark cut deeply into the child's grieved heart.

She tried hard not to hate her cruel persecutor, but she could scarcely help it, she had wounded her pride so fearfully, crushed out every hope from her, almost taken life itself, kept her by night and by day in the deepest humiliation and degradation, until it seemed to her that there was no help for it but death. She would pray for that to come, as she believed there was no other deliverance for her.

"Come, we must move out o' here!" said the woman, rising abruptly and pocketing her change. "Be a smart girl an' tend to your money-gettin' sharp."

"I—I will," muttered the child, stubbornly, following the waddling form out into the street, which seemed a terror to her when she thought of what awaited her.

Those in the street that she met seemed to take no interest in the story she piped out. Her zeal and interest seemed lacking, her conscience seemed to upbraid her for falsehoods which she had come to realize she was uttering.

Mrs. Lawson noticed these traits that were beginning to be apparent, and she nagged and scolded her until her head grew dizzy, and she feared that she could not stand the torture a day longer.

The hours that followed dragged their slow lengths by, and to every charitably disposed individual that gave alms to her there were a dozen callous-hearted persons who passed her by without a look, turning a deaf ear to her pathetic appeals.

"This won't do at all!" grumbled Mrs. Lawson, bustling up to her, with no attempt to conceal her anger and growing greed. "Put wings to your feet and let's go down where all those grand drives are. Look out that the meddlesome police don't run you into the police-station while you stand and cry out feebly for alms."

There was nothing to do but to move wearily

on; and after traversing a dozen streets or so, they came in sight of a grand parade that was lined with fashionable equipages, and with gaily dressed women and children smiling from their midst.

Very few of the occupants deigned to cast as much as a look at the weary on-lookers by the dusty road-side, who elbowed each other to get a glimpse of the glittering array that shone resplendent under the sun's bright rays.

Minna stepped up to one carriage in which a handsome, fashionably dressed young man was indolently seated, holding the reins quite loosely in his tan-kid gloves. She made a move in the direction he had taken, and called out eagerly for a little pittance.

As the child's white face loomed up at the side of the carriage the horse took fright, shied, and for an instant became uncontrollable.

Minna gave a little scream of terror, as the animal lurched dangerously near her, threw up her hands, and fell in a heap at the head of the road.

"Heavens! the fright has nearly killed her!" he thought, with horror, struggling to check the animal lest he should make a fatal leap at the prostrate child.

By a mighty jerk the animal was subdued, but not an instant too soon, and the owner of the carriage recognised full well that it was a most miraculous escape.

But the girl who lay there within a stone's-throw, so white and still, never made the slightest move. Had death come to her then and there, brought on by fright at the wild antics of his horse? he asked himself with a shudder; and if so, would her relatives hold him responsible?

Quick as thought a way out of the difficulty occurred to him, and he seized upon the idea without delay.

Wheeling his carriage round suddenly, he drew rein at the spot where the child was.

Minna had overcome her dizziness, and was struggling up, looking vacantly about her as the memory of what had just happened came back to her.

"You asked me for aid!" he said. "Here, take this, child," and he threw his pocket-book into her lap. The next instant he was gone.

It had all happened so suddenly that Minna scarcely realised what it all meant, until her hand came into contact with the small black purse.

Mechanically she opened it and saw some notes in it, also nearly ten shillings in small change. The latter fell like a shower in the child's lap.

Something intuitively warned her that this was the opportunity she had prayed and waited for.

She did not know whether the money rightfully belonged to her or Mrs. Lawson; but some inward mentor seemed to counsel her not to give up the notes that were in the purse, only the half dozen silver pieces, which she knew would more than satisfy Mrs. Lawson.

Minna had barely time to slip the well-filled pocket-book up her tight sleeve, well knowing it would be secure there, ere Mrs. Lawson made her appearance. She saw that the girl was unable to move alone, and she half carried her to a bench in the distance, where they rested awhile.

Her keen eyes had not detected the man's magnanimous act of charity, and her surprise was great when her companion handed over the silver pieces to her.

"It's near dusk," she cried, chuckling over her good fortune. "I'm goin' to get somethin' good to eat at a bigger place than the last one. You come with me, and if I get through my supper first I'll leave you for a few minutes while I hunt up a cheap lodging place, as I see you're too lame to tramp very much farther to-night."

Tired and sore in every limb as poor Minna was she could not refrain from clapping her hands, and she laughed and cried in one breath over the proposed plan.

It was wonderful how the poor girl kept pace with the woman, forgetful of her aches and woes, never once pausing to take breath even until they came to a well-kept restaurant, which they entered pompously.

"Gimme the best meal in your house you can serve for two for three shillings!" she cried to a

pompous-looking waiter. "I'm in a great hurry!"

The order was soon served, and Mrs. Lawson and Minna did ample justice to their bountiful supper.

When they had finished the woman said, hurriedly:

"You'll have to sit here awhile till I find a cheap room in some place to-night. Mind, I won't be long!"

Without another word she left the child and commenced a hurried search among the cheap lodgings, wandering farther and farther away from the child whom she had left among strangers, penniless, as she supposed.

Minna could not bear the thought of seeing Mrs. Lawson again.

"I will go far away from here," she decided. "I would rather die than live this life with her!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

"I AM free! May Heaven help me to go far away from here before that cruel woman returns!" was the joyous thought that came to the child at finding herself alone.

Minna slipped from her seat with nervous haste. No one within cast as much as a glance upon the retreating figure that darkened the door-way for a moment, then flitted out swiftly into the night and the darkness.

For a moment she was undecided which way she should take, her only fear being that Mrs. Lawson might hasten back, and finding her gone, overtake her.

But hope was high within her, and she would risk anything for freedom's sake.

People stared curiously at the sweet, pale-faced creature who shrunk from the awing crowds of humanity walking within the shadow of the huge buildings; but she could not bide effectually the dingy, shapeless gown of coarse faded calico which encircled her slender frame, nor her bare little feet, which were cold as ice now, and sore from exposure and her long tramps, while her hair streamed in unkempt ripples down her back, forming a dainty picture of fragile, infantile loveliness.

As she hurried along she encountered a flood of bright gas lights which arrested her attention, and she forgot her fear and watch-care for an instant long enough to peer wonderingly in upon the tempting array of goods that were displayed to the public for sale.

A pair of bright, shiny shoes, dresses ready made, and other needed garments met her gaze, and she walked timidly into the shop, and in a clear, determined voice asked to see the goods she wanted to buy.

Shoes, dresses, and ready-made goods were temptingly shown her, and Minna made her purchases, asking leave to put them on in an adjoining room, to which they consented.

And when she appeared before them a little later, neatly dressed from head to foot, they declared that no one would know her to be the same girl who had entered the place in ragged garments a short time before.

Minna felt like quite a different being herself as she proceeded on her way towards the town.

The streets were thinning out; everybody seemed in a hurry to reach their home. She would soon have to find some place to rest herself. She asked one or two kind-looking ladies if they knew of a place where she could sleep, but none of them seemed acquainted with lodging-houses, for they did not direct her to any place near by.

One or two policemen had caught sight of her, and had looked at her keenly as she was hurrying along.

She managed to evade them, however, by walking beside some pedestrian with whom they supposed she had come.

She stepped up to a weary-plodding telegraph-boy who was on his way to deliver messages, and asked him to direct her to a good lodging-house, adding that she had walked so far that day that she was faint with fatigue and could not go much farther.

In the direction in which he was going he told her that he knew of several home-like places that would just suit her, and he offered to go with her as far as his route lay, which was within half a mile of three moderate-priced boarding-houses.

Young as Minna was, she had no small knowledge of human nature, and she read in the young messenger's honest face and frank manner confidence which would not be misplaced, and she trusted him, and walked fearlessly beside him, while he told her what he knew of the boarding-places he had recommended.

(To be continued.)

BLIND BUT BEAUTIFUL.

(Continued from page 344.)

CHAPTER VII.

Snow was lying thick upon the ground when Digby Stretton returned from his exile and set foot on English ground once more. The dying leaves had been falling around him when he set out, with bitterness in his heart, to take possession of his new estates.

His business had been satisfactorily accomplished, and he was coming home a far richer man than when he went away—rich in worldly goods, as it seemed, in mockery of his heart sickness. What was wealth to him if all he fancied was true? What was all the luxury and glitter in the world if Beryl was not left to him?

He had heard from her once or twice before the terrible tale that had come through his neighbourhood, but her letters were, of necessity, laboured and short. She could write, but she was more or less at the mercy of other people in her correspondence; and for the last few weeks even those unsatisfactory evidences of her affection had ceased.

His mother had written too, but so curtly that he could gather nothing from her letters, and he had only replied to her last by the announcement of his speedy return.

"No need to enter into any particulars with her," he said to himself; "I will go back unannounced, and see for myself what is going on."

And while he was rushing through the country with a heart as heavy as the leaden clouds that filled the sky Beryl and her mother-in-law sat in the small drawing-room at Stretton Royal with eager and loving expectation in both their faces.

"Mamma, when can he be here?" asked Beryl.

"I feel as if I should go mad."

"My dear, do try and be calm, you will do yourself a mischief. Recollect you are to be very careful about excitement."

"Yes, I know, mamma; but who would not be excited at such a time? To think that my darling is coming, and that I—mamma, I must have a good cry, or I shall scream and do something dreadful."

"My dear Beryl, my dear child, do remember what the doctor said, 'above all, no tears.' Try and be quiet, dear; you may undo the work of weeks in an hour, and then what will be left?"

"What will be any altogether, I wonder?" Beryl said, softly.

And then she sighed, a little sigh, of apprehension as it seemed; and, rising from her seat by the fire, began to pace the room impatiently.

She was wonderfully altered; there was a firmness and decision about her step, and a look of interest in her face that had not been there when her husband left her; and her eyes, always bright, were full of life and keenness now.

"Do I frighten you?" she asked, presently.

"No, dear; it I were not an old woman I should do the same, I dare say. I am quite as excited as you are. Both my darlings are coming home to-night, remember that."

"I don't forget it, mamma. I do so long to see Hubert."

She talked of "seeing" as most blind folk do, and Lady Stretton smiled as she heard the word.

She was a happy woman that dull evening. The cloud that had hung over her youngest darling was lifted at last, and Hubert was free to come home, with all his debts wiped out, and his wild oats all sown—at least, he declared the latter to be the fact—and his mother believed him, as she had believed him many a time and oft before.

"Mother, dear, where are you? Where is Beryl?"

The voice sounded loud and clear through the house, and Beryl started up with a wild scream.

"He is come," she cried; "my love, my darling," and before Lady Stretton could interpose a word she had rushed out of the room and down the staircase.

And this was what Digby Stretton saw when he came home that winter night.

He would not take a conveyance from the nearest town; he left his luggage to come on after him and walked. It was only about a mile, and he would surprise them all. There should be no time for preparation of either faces or speech, and in one moment he would see—would know—whether his suspicions were true or false. Doubtless Hubert was at home before this, he had heard nothing more about him. Ah, well, if he were, he might stay there; he might have Stretton Royal and all in it for aught he cared. He would go away across the sea again, and hide his luckless head amongst the hills and valleys of his new possessions.

No one saw him enter the park; the gate at the lodge was open, and the woman had just admitted someone who walked through as if he had a right to be there—a gentleman with a small bag in his hand, and a comforter twisted lightly round his neck.

"My brother," Sir Digby said to himself, and followed him with swift, silent steps that kept up with him unseen till he was admitted into the house.

The brother outside heard the glad welcome of the servants, and stepped aside for a moment to collect his thoughts.

The conservatory was ruddy with lights, and Hubert stepped in there, throwing aside his wraps, and calling out cheerfully to his mother and Beryl.

Then he saw her—he, the husband, that stood outside in the cold and darkness—come into the room with a fleet step, as if the sound of his voice was sufficient guide, and throw herself into his arms, nestling on his breast as if her place was there, and turning her face up to his with loving tenderness.

He could hear her words, too, for some one had left a pane open, and her voice came out on the night air clear and distinct.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" he heard her say, "come at last! My handsome love!"

And then she pressed kisses on his face as though she would never have her fill, and clung to him, and wept in her joyous excitement, till his brain seemed as if it were on fire as he looked at her and him.

He heard his brother laugh gaily, and then he saw, as if in a mist, many people come into the conservatory.

He did not see his mother, though she was there, but he saw a man, a stranger to him, come and speak to Hubert, and then all seemed to grow dark round him, and when he recovered his wits the flowers and waving trees were the only things to be seen behind the glass.

The actors in the scene he had witnessed had all disappeared, as if he had dreamed it; but it was no dream.

There were Hubert's hat and scarf just as he had thrown them down. He was there, and it was to him, his false and ungrateful brother, that his wife had come—it was in his arms she had lain, and her lips had murmured words of greeting to him that of right belonged only to him, her husband.

What need for him to wait for more terrible evidence that he was forgotten when the sound of his brother's voice could bring her unguided, unaided, to his arms like that?

He would go as he had come. Stretton Royal should see him no more, and he would

write to his mother, and make arrangements for—

"Ah! he must not think of it! He must not let himself speak of it or he should go mad—mad! and then he should, maybe, shriek out his misery to all the world, and shame her! He would go—anywhere!"

It was five o'clock now. There was yet time for him to reach the coast. He would go on the Continent—anywhere—and try and steady himself enough to think what his future course should be; but he must put the sea between him and his brother, or he might go back and forget everything but his great wrong and his life-long sorrow.

"Pardon me, sir; should you not put this on?"

Some one was speaking to him as he sat on the deck of the steamer that was ploughing her way through a somewhat turbulent sea to the port of Flushing.

He was not aware that he had not put on his overcoat, and that it was lying across his knees while the sharp wind whistled round him, and his teeth were all chattering with the cold.

He looked up and saw a gentleman, well muffled up, standing by his side.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, in a pleasant voice, though with something like a foreign accent in it. "I am a little of a doctor, among other things, and I do not like to see any man trifling with his life. It is no night to sit without an overcoat when one has got one to put on."

"Thank you," Sir Digby said, rising, and accepting his proffered help to get into the neglected garment. "I was hardly thinking of what I was doing. I was—"

"Full of sadness. I see it in your face."

"Yes—full of overdoing."

"And I am so full of joy to-night!" He was a loquacious person—this pleasant faced foreigner. "Full of joy and thankfulness, and I would have everyone the same if I could—if I knew how."

"Ah, you have reason, perhaps."

"That I have. I have, under Heaven, brought happiness and new life to a sweet lady—to a whole family. Ah, you are listening to me! I am glad to see life come into your eyes, for I thought—"

He stopped for a minute, looking at Sir Digby, as if irresolute whether to go on or not.

"Thought what?"

"I thought, pardon me, that you looked, as you sat there, as if you were half inclined to try whether yonder water would bring you oblivion. I have seen that look in a human face before more than once, and each time it has meant death."

"Are you a wizard that you can read a person's thoughts?"

"No; but I can see I have read yours. Again I say pardon me, and come down into the cabin, out of sight of that boiling sea."

Sir Digby suffered himself to be led downstairs, and the gentleman, rightly divining that he was well-nigh exhausted, ordered refreshments to be brought, and persuaded him to take some.

"I don't know you," the Baronet said, when a little brandy-and-water brought back some of his flagging energies. "But whoever you may be I thank you. You have done a great service. I was thinking as you say. You have exorcised the fiend for a time, at any rate."

"For which I thank Heaven!" the stranger said. "Now try a cigar. You smoke! Ah, that is better. So do I," and he pulled out his card-case, and with it an envelope, which fell at Sir Digby's feet. "It is nothing private," the gentleman said, "only a portrait, but the loveliest face I ever saw. See!" and he put it into the Baronet's hand—a portrait of Beryl.

A speaking likeness, but with a look he had never seen in her face—the look he had marked there as she ran down to spring into his brother's arms.

"You know this lady?" he gasped, staring at the stranger who had given it to him.

"Know her! Surely. I am Doctor Erasmus Glück, at your service, and the lady has been patient of mine for some weeks. The most

successful case I ever treated. I have only left her to-night. I have been treated like a prince, and made to feel as if I were a dear friend instead of a doctor, who worked for a fee like any other man."

"Tell me!" entreated the Baronet. "Let me hear all about it! I—I know, the lady!"

"Know her? Then you know an angel! She was blind—you know that!"

"Was blind? Is she—can she see?"

"As well as you can. Listen. Her husband had a brother—a what-do-you-call it—a scapegrace—who knew me in Germany some time ago, and knew also of a cure I made in a similar case."

"When he saw his brother's wife he told her, and it became a plan between them all—the brother, and the mother and the lady herself—that she should try what I could do to cure her, saying nothing to her husband. He loved her so dearly, and she adored him so truly, that she made up her mind to keep the secret till all should be over for well or ill, lest they might unnerve each other by their anxiety. It was to be a surprise to him when it was done, but there was a difficulty in the way. It was necessary that the young lady should come to Germany to me and be under my sole charge for a month at least. They did not know how to manage that part of it at all."

"But it was managed!"

"Yes. As if Heaven had interposed to bring it all about the husband was called away to see about some property in a foreign country, and the brother made all the arrangements, and the lady and her attendant came to me at Wiesbaden, and put themselves into my hands. She was a model patient—she was so anxious to do all she could to help her own cure, 'for his sake.' She always whispered to me when we talked together, and she was never tired of talking of her husband whom she had never seen. There was one thing that had never been explained to her, I found, and that was what her husband was like."

"The attendant, a shrewdish woman, but wonderfully sharp and active, told me that he was a curiously ugly man; his face being distorted in some way through an accident, but he was the best of men. I thought my patient ought to be told, but it was no business of mine, and I said nothing, and there came of it a funny mistake."

"A mistake!" Sir Digby wondered if that were indeed his own voice that was speaking. "What mistake!"

"Oh! it was all set right; but it was odd, though I feared for a little time what the effect might be. A week ago I took the young lady home, and I found that both her husband and his brother were expected about the same time. She had never seen the brother, though he had made all the arrangements for her stay with me. I would not let her see anybody or anything till the proper time came. She had kept her secret. At the cost of a good deal of unpleasantness to herself, I found, when we got to England, she was even suspected of having run away from her husband, but she will live all that time when she has him by her side and can tell him all about it."

"I have been at her house ever since, and this evening the brother came back. She heard his voice and mistook it for her husband's—they are alike in that respect, I am told—and she took possession of him, and flung herself into his arms before anyone could stop her. She was sadly distressed when she found out her mistake, but she has got over it by this time, for doubtless he has arrived ere this. He was hourly expected. I wanted much to see him, but I had to leave to-night. I have a critical case to look to to-morrow, and I must have a steady hand and no fatigue in my eyes when I go to it."

"Fool! fool!" gasped Digby Stretton, realising the truth now, and springing from his seat; "what a blind, dotting ass I must have been! No, I am not going mad, Dr. Glück. I thought I had seen your face somewhere. It was in the conservatory; you came in and spoke to my brother. Can you not guess who I am? I am the man you have been talking about, that lady's husband, Digby Stretton."

"H'm, I think I understand," the German ec-culst said to himself, as he laid his companion

down on the settee for a moment, for the cabin was whirling round with Sir Digby, and he would have fallen but for the doctor's arm. "Courage, *mon ami*, you will get a boat back from Flushing if we are lucky enough to be in to our time, and you can get home before your absence has been extended enough to give them much uneasiness."

The officials at Flushing must have thought the tall Englishman with the white face was certainly a madman, for he scrambled from one boat to the other without so much as going ashore for a moment, and started on his homeward journey after a brief handclasp, and some grateful words to his new acquaintance.

It was late the next day when he presented himself, wan and travel-worn, at the lodge gate, and nearly frightened the good woman who kept it into a fit by his sudden appearance.

"Lord ha' mercy, sir!" she exclaimed, "I'm thankful to see you this day; there's news come about your luggage, and my lady is in a terrible way."

"But she is well, Sally! They are all well!"

"Yes! they're well, Sir Digby, but troubled about you. My lady has been taking on terrible this morning, Mr. Stretton says, and it makes them afraid for her eyes and for the baby when it comes; for you see, Sir Digby, she's gone through a lot, poor dear, and—"

"Here, get out of the way," the Baronet said, flinging her a sovereign, and leaving her talking at a great rate, while he sped up the avenue as fast as his legs would carry him. He seemed as if he should never reach the house, as if the long stretch of fine old trees were lengthening themselves out interminably. But he did reach it at last, and was standing in the dining-room with his brother's hand clasped in his own almost before he knew how he got into the house.

"Beryl," he said, "my wife—where is she?" In his arms and nestling to his heart almost before the words were well out of his mouth, and his mother too, with tears of joy in her naughty eyes, and all the miserable past would come to be as a dream.

"I was detained, dear," was all the explanation he gave to Beryl, and his absence; "you shall know how some day."

But it was not till three months had gone by, and she was sitting by his side with a tiny pink creature in her arms that he told her of what had happened to him that miserable night; and how, but for his chance meeting with the German doctor who had restored her sight, they two might have gone apart to their lives' end, each misunderstanding the other.

"And I should never have known how they exaggerated when they said you were ugly, Digby, dear!" Beryl said, laying her soft cheek on the hand that rested on her shoulder. "It is a base libel; my husband is a very good-looking man, and the baby will be just like his father."

"Heaven forbid," was Sir Digby's pious ejaculation; "one in a family is enough. Ah, Beryl! if you had not been blind I doubt you would never have chosen me."

But Beryl says she should, and I think she speaks the truth.

[THE END.]

AN important industry that flourishes in the Scilly Islands and brings wealth to the people is the open air cultivation of narcissus flowers for the London market. There are several hundred acres devoted to these flowers upon the Islands of St. Mary's, Treco and St. Martin's. The soil is a white sand, similar to that in which bulbs are so successfully grown in Holland. The bulbs are placed about six inches apart each way in beds about four feet in width. With some varieties the bulbs are lifted each year, and replanted in the autumn, while with others they remain unmoved for three years. If the weather is mild, the early varieties are ready for cutting by Christmas, while the different varieties give a succession of bloom throughout the winter. So abundant are the flower stalks that at the last cutting scythes are used. The flowers sent from the Scillies are nearly all sold by commission dealers at Covent Garden market.

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SUNLIGHT & LIFEBOUY SOAP COMPETITIONS.

The first of these Monthly Competitions will be held January 30th, 1897, to be followed by others Each Month during 1897. Competitors sending in the most coupons win the best prizes, but every competitor sending in not less than 50 Sunlight or 50 Lifebuoy coupons wins a prize.

£66,156.0.0. in PRIZES of CASH, BICYCLES,* £66,156.0.0. WATCHES† and BOOKS,

GIVEN FREE for SUNLIGHT and LIFEBOUY Soap WRAPPERS.

Rules.

1. Competitors may enter EACH or EVERY MONTH for EITHER or BOTH "Sunlight" or "Lifebuoy" Competitions, but must send in the "SUNLIGHT" or "LIFEBOUY" Coupons in SEPARATE PACKETS suitably marked on the outside of the postal wrapper "SUNLIGHT" or "LIFEBOUY."
2. For this competition the United Kingdom will be divided into 7 Districts, and the Prizes will be awarded every month during 1897 in each of the 7 Districts as stated below.
3. Competitors to save as many "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP" Wrappers as they may collect. Cut off the top portion of each wrapper—that portion containing the heading "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP"—and enclose with these (called "Coupons") a sheet of paper stating Competitor's full name and address, and the number of coupons sent in, and forward same (see Rule 1) postage paid to Lever Brothers, Limited, Port Sunlight, near Birkenhead, marked on the Postal Wrapper (top left-hand corner) with the NUMBER of the DISTRICT Competition lives in, and the word "SUNLIGHT" or "LIFEBOUY," whichever coupons the packet contain.
4. The competition will CLOSE the LAST DAY OF EACH MONTH. Coupons received too late for one month's competition will be put into the next. All parcels on which postage has not been fully paid WILL BE REFUSED.
5. Competitors who obtain wrappers from unsold soap in dealer's stock will be disqualified. Employees of Lever Brothers, Limited, and their families are debarred from competing.
6. A printed list of winners in competitor's district will be forwarded to competitors in about 5 weeks after each monthly competition closes.
7. Lever Brothers, Limited, will endeavour to award the prizes fairly to the best of their ability and judgment, but it is understood that ALL WHO COMPETE AGREE TO ACCEPT THE AWARD of Lever Brothers, Limited, as final.



PRIZES FOR SUNLIGHT COUPONS.

The 1 Competitor in each District who sends in the largest number of Sunlight Coupons from the District in which he or she resides, will receive £21 cash.
 The 10 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, carriage paid, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's "Premier" Bicycle, price £21.
 The 40 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's Rolled Gold Watch, price £4 4s.
 The remaining Sunlight Competitors will each receive Cloth-bound Books, by Popular Authors, in the proportion of 1 Book for every 50 Sunlight Coupons sent in.

Total Prizes for Sunlight Coupons during 1897

PRIZES FOR LIFEBOUY COUPONS.

The 1 Competitor in each District who sends in the largest number of Lifebuoy Coupons from the District in which he or she resides, will receive £21 cash.
 The 10 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, carriage paid, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's "Premier" Bicycle, price £21.
 The 40 Competitors in each District who send in the next largest number will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gentleman's Rolled Gold Watch, price £4 4s.
 The remaining Lifebuoy Competitors will each receive Cloth-bound Books, by Popular Authors, in the proportion of 1 Book for every 50 Lifebuoy Coupons sent in.

Total Prizes for Lifebuoy Coupons during 1897

GRAND TOTAL of all Prizes given for Sunlight and Lifebuoy Coupons, 1897

Total Prizes in all Districts during 1897.

£1,764	0	0
17,640	0	0
14,112	0	0
10,000	0	0
£43,516	0	0
1,764	0	0
8,820	0	0
7,856	0	0
5,000	0	0
22,640	0	0
£66,156	0	0

* The Bicycles are the celebrated Helical (Spiral) Tube "Premier" Cycles, 1897 Pattern, manufactured by the New "Premier" Cycle Company, Ltd., of Coventry, and 14 Holborn Viaduct, London, fitted with Fleets Tubeless Pneumatic Tyres and accessories.
 † These are 14-carat Half Hunter Rolled Gold Watches, jewelled, 4-plate.

No. of District.	NAME OF DISTRICT.
1	IRELAND.
2	SCOTLAND.
3	LONDON, MIDDLESEX, KENT, SURREY.
4	WALES, LANCASHIRE, CHESHIRE.
5	NORTHUMBERLAND, DURHAM, WEST-MORELAND, CUMBERLAND, YORK-SHIRE, ISLE OF MAN.
6	SHERIFFSHIRE, HEREFORDSHIRE, MONMOUTHSHIRE, STAFFORDSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE, WARWICKSHIRE, DEBYSHIRE, LEICESTERSHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, BERKSHIRE, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, RUTLANDSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE, HUNTINGDONSHIRE.
7	MORFOLK, SUFFOLK, ESSEX, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, BEDFORDSHIRE, HERTFORDSHIRE, SUSSEX, HAMPSHIRE, ISLE OF WIGHT, CHANNEL ISLANDS, WILTSHIRE, DORSETSHIRE, SOMERSETSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, DEVONSHIRE, CORNWALL.

FACETIE.

AUNTIE: "When I was your age I never told a lie, Tommy." Tommy: "When did you begin, auntie!"

A BIG Yankee from Maine, on paying his bill in a London restaurant, was told that the sum put down didn't include the waiter. "Wal," he roared, "I didn't eat any waiter, did I!"

At the turning of the ways they parted; she crossed the road, shook her fist at her escort, and yelled: "I'm off, Bill! 'Taint my fault; it's all on account of your bloomin' want of ignorance!"

THE WIFE: "When you proposed to me, John, did you think I would accept you?" The Husband: "Not the first time." "The Second!" "I wasn't going to propose but once."

"WELL, father," exclaimed the prodigal son, as he made his appearance at the family fire-side, "are you ready to kill the fatted calf?" "No," replied the old man, grimly, "I think I'll let you live."

"I TELL you frankly that I shall not be able to pay for this suit until next year," said Johnny Fewscads. "All right, sir," replied the tailor. "When will you have it ready?" "Next year."

"It's needless to ask you the question, madam; you know what I want," said the tramp. "Yes, I know what you want badly; I've only got one bar of soap in the house, and the servant is using it. Come again some other time."

MAGISTRATE: "I am surprised to find such criminality in one so young. Only fourteen, and yet you are caught picking pockets!" Prisoner: "It were all yer own fault." "Mine?" "Yus. If yer hadn't given father three months I wouldn't have had to work for another."

AN ironmonger received a case of hardware the other day; and on comparing it with his invoice found everything all right, except a hammer, which was missing. "Och! I don't be troubled about that," said his Irish porter, "sure and faith the man took it out to open the case wid it."

It was once told to a certain king of England that Lord Blank was his politest subject. "I will test him," said the king; and showed Lord Blank to the royal carriage, holding the door for him to enter first, which he did. "You are right," said the King; "a lesser man would have troubled me with ceremony."

"You say your husband no longer spends his evenings at the club!" said her mother. "I soon broke him of that," answered the daughter. "How did you manage it?" "Before going to bed I put two easy-chairs together by the parlour-fire, and then held a match to a cigar until the room got a faint odour of smoke."

MISTRESS (reprovingly): "Bridget, breakfast is very late this morning. I noticed last night that you had company in the kitchen, and it was nearly twelve o'clock when you went to bed." Bridget: "Yis, mum; I knowed you was awake, fur I heard yer movin' around; an' I said to meself y'd nade alaps this mornin', an' I wouldn't disturb ye wid an early breakfast, mum."

A CERTAIN benevolent old gentleman is very absent-minded. The other day he stumbled upon a beggar who had a board suspended from his neck on which stood in large letters—"Deaf and dumb." Unthinkingly, he asked in a loud voice: "Have you been a long time in this state?" Distraction is evidently contagious, for the beggar replied: "From my birth."

A LADY was given a Christmas-box by her husband and three children. The youngest, a little over five years old, was appointed to make the speech of presentation. She did it after much preparation for the occasion, and this was the form it took: "Dear mamma, this gift is presented to you by your three children and your one husband."

A CERTAIN mother was the proud possessor of twins, who were as much alike as two peas. One night she heard a series of giggles proceeding from the neighbourhood of the twins' bed. "What are you laughing at there!" she asked. "Oh, nothing," replied Edith, one of the twins, "only you have given me two baths and Alice none."

In a workshop when the men absented themselves they were to produce a doctor's certificate. An Irishman, absent, however, on a second occasion, and told to bring his certificate, gave in the one used before. The manager, looking at it, said,—

"Why, Pat, this is the old certificate." "Sure I know that," said Pat, "and isn't it the old complaint?"

"OH, YES," said the eldest Miss Culture, the other evening, "I breakfasted yesterday with Mrs. Brainweight, and we enjoyed a delicious repast—excellent coffee, nice bread, and pica-torial globes, done most admirably." "What?" inquired her friend. "Pica-torial globes," repeated the maiden. "And what under the sun are they?" "I believe," said Miss Culture, "I believe uncultured people call them fish-balls."

"YEs," said Mrs. Gimp as the door closed behind the new maid. "She's the most reliable girl I ever hired. Of course, she isn't a beauty—" "Well, I don't know about that," interrupted Mr. Gimp, with some suddenness. "It depends a good deal upon what you consider beauty. The girl has a lovely eye, hasn't she, Briggs?" "A fine eye," said Briggs. "And a beautifully rounded arm. Did you notice her arm, Briggs?" "It was a nice arm," said Briggs. At this moment Mrs. Gimp arose suddenly, and left the apartment. "Say," said Briggs, "what in thunder—" "Listen!" said Mr. Gimp. The sound of voices in altercation came from the direction of the kitchen. "Mrs. G. is discharging the new girl," said Mr. Gimp. "But I don't see," said Briggs, "what—" "The truth is," interposed Mr. Gimp, "the new girl couldn't broil a steak for sour apples! You see?"

SOCIETY.

It is at present understood in the Royal Household that the Queen's visit to Omsk will extend over about six weeks, and that Her Majesty will return direct to Windsor about the 28th of April.

There are to be two Drawing Rooms at Buckingham Palace about the end of February, which, according to present arrangements, will be held by the Princess of Wales.

The German Emperor heads the list of Her Majesty's grandchildren, and little Prince Maurice Donald of Battenberg ends it. Princess Feodora of Saxe-Meiningen gracefully leads the great-grandchildren, to whose ranks the baby son of Princess Henry of Prussia is the latest addition.

The Duke and Duchess of Cumberland and their family leave there in the middle of January for Cannes, the doctors having urged the necessity of conveying the young Prince George William, who is now convalescent, to the South to recruit his health.

The German Emperor and Empress always like to spend their Christmas at the Neu Palace in Potsdam, and remain there until it is necessary to go to Berlin for the New Year's Court festivities. This year was no exception to the rule, and for many days before the Great Festival the children, and, in fact, the entire Imperial household, were in a state of great excitement.

There is to be a large family gathering at Osborne towards the end of the month, when the Battenberg Memorial Chapel in Whippingham Church will be formally dedicated by the Bishop of Winchester. It is probable that the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse, the Countess Erbach-Schönberg and her son, Count Alexander and Prince Francis of Battenberg will come to England on a visit to the Queen, in order that they may be present at this function.

The Queen has conferred the First Class of the Royal Order of Victoria and Albert upon the Empress of Russia, and the Duchess of York has been admitted to the Second Class. There had not been a creation in either of these classes for more than five years, the Queen of Roumania being the junior member of the one and the Grand Duchess of Hesse of the other.

The Queen has instituted the Royal Victorian Order in anticipation of the festivities of June next, when this decoration will be largely distributed in all the five classes, and there will be several creations on New Year's Day and on Her Majesty's Birthday.

That the Tsar is moving and working cannot be doubted; and another proof of the fact comes in the news that he has just authorised the establishment of compulsory education for members of the artisan class engaged in workshops and factories. This is undoubtedly, for Russia, a wonderful step in advance; and our readers may be sure that it has the most enthusiastic sympathy of the young Empress, who is a true daughter of her lamented mother in the furtherance of all schemes of popular education and advancement.

The monolith which the Queen has erected to the memory of Prince Henry of Battenberg in Ballochbuie Forest is constructed of red granite, and is nearly fourteen feet high, and four feet broad. The front is very elaborately carved and ornamented. The monolith is placed on a knoll on the slope of Craig Dyne, with a lawn in front and a background of magnificent Scotch firs. Ballochbuie was decided upon as the site for the memorial, instead of the hill of Craig Gowan (as was originally proposed), because Prince Henry was particularly fond of this forest, and he constantly walked and rode to it. It was at the Prince's suggestion that the Queen built the Dunsig Shiel, a cottage among the woods, which is near to the river Dee and the Falls of Garbh Ailn. This is now Her Majesty's favourite place for five-o'clock tea, and on several fine days during the last month of her stay at Balmoral she lunched and spent the afternoon there. The inscription on the monolith is as follows:

"Erected to the memory of her beloved and lamented son-in-law, Henry Maurice, Prince of Battenberg, by Victoria, R.I., 1896."

STATISTICS.

For every thirty-six births in Germany there are twenty-three deaths.

It is said that 60 per cent. of the cases of short-sightedness are hereditary.

Only 9 per cent. of the soldiers actually engaged in war are killed in the field of battle.

In proportion to its size Berlin has eight times as many miles of railway as the United States.

A GREAT authority on fish says that every square mile of the sea is inhabited by 120,000,000 finny creatures.

An average of three British seamen loose their lives every day by drowning, and 300 British steamers and sailing vessels are lost at sea yearly.

GEMS.

A GOOD name is rather to be chosen than great riches.

No matter how many mistakes you may have made. The point is—what have you learned by them?

COURAGE to meet duty is power to overcome difficulties; without this principle our strength is indeed weakness.

There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration; they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us.

SINCERE sympathy never wholly fails, but it is chiefly successful when it inspires power and courage and hope; when it awakens new interests, and leads to some sort of vigorous action.

The best part of one's life is the performance of one's daily duties. All higher motives, ideas, conceptions, sentiments in a man's life are of little value if they do not strengthen him for the better discharge of the duties which devolve upon him in the ordinary affairs of life.

SYMPATHY is one of the great secrets of life. It overcomes evil and strengthens good. It disarms resistance, melts the hardened heart, and develops the better part of human nature. It is one of the great truths on which Christianity is based. "Love one another" contains a gospel sufficient to renovate the world.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

EGGS WITH CREAM SAUCE.—Boil eggs hard, dash cold water over them, and when cooled take off the shells. Make a cream sauce, and season with chopped parsley or with curry powder. Just before serving pour the sauce over the eggs.

APPLE SHORTCAKE.—Make a reasonably plain pie crust, which, if handled like puff paste, is very nice. This paste should be rolled into two thin layers, and lightly baked on a tin, placing one on top of the other, but being careful not to press them together. When baked they can be separated with much greater ease than if made into one cake and pulled apart. Rich apple sauce should then be liberally spread between the two layers of crust and on top, and served with cream.

POT PIE.—Cut and joint a large chicken. Cover with water, let it boil gently until tender. Season with pepper and salt, and thicken gravy with two tablespoonfuls of flour mixed smooth in a piece of butter the size of an egg. Have ready nice light bread dough; cut with a biscuit-cutter about an inch thick, and drop into boiling gravy, having previously removed the chicken to a hot platter. Cover and let boil one-half to three quarters of an hour. Stick in a fork to ascertain if done; if it comes out clean they are. Lay on the platter with the chicken, and pour over the gravy, and serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

OWING to the dry, cold atmosphere, not a single infectious disease is known in Greenland.

THERE are two places on the earth's surface where there is but one day and one night throughout the year.

THE largest room in the world is in the Imperial palace of St. Petersburg. It is 100 feet long by 150 feet wide.

IN China a man cannot by will dispose of his land in favour of any one person, whether relative or stranger; it must be distributed among all his male children without exception.

THE wild tribes of the Caucasus, Russia, teach their children the use of the dagger as soon as the youngsters are able to walk. They are first taught to stab water without making a splash.

NEW GUINEA is the home of the most wonderful feathered creatures known to the student of ornithology—the awful raptor 'n'doob, or "bird of death." A wound from the beak of this creature causes excruciating pains in every part of the body, loss of sight, speech, and hearing, convulsions, lockjaw, and certain death.

THE most curious railway in the world, which is only in use during the winter, is that between Cronstadt and Oranienbaum, which is laid upon the ice. Its success has suggested the construction of a similar winter railway between the two important commercial centres, Krenientseburg and Jekatarinozlay, which are united in summer by the steamboat traffic along the river Dnieper. This means of communication is closed in winter by the ice, and a long, costly, round-about journey has to be made between the two towns, though they do not lie far apart. So the ice of the Dnieper is to be utilized in future during the long winter by constructing a railway line across it for passengers and goods.

A NEW invention for finding the location of sunken vessels is about to be adopted by some of the steamship lines. It consists of a buoy attached to a long rope, which is placed loosely in a suitable receptacle on the vessel's deck. If the ship sinks, the buoy floats upon the surface, and the rope gradually uncoils as the cage containing it descends. The theory is a very good one, but the possibility of entangling the rope in the rigging of the vessel and dragging the buoy down with it is suggested by the fact that when a ship goes down there must be a tremendous swirl and washing about of water, sufficient, at least, to make the usefulness of a buoy and any ordinary rope attached to it very slim indeed.

On the western shore of Angel Island, in the harbour of San Francisco, about half way between the steamer landing and the fog-bell signal, is a most interesting natural curiosity. It is a tunnel that goes directly through an enormous cliff. When viewed from a short distance the tunnel appears to be only a small hole, but close examination reveals the fact that it is quite ten feet high and at least thirty feet long. At high tide it has a foot of water in it, and were it not for the rocks close to the entrances could be entered with a boat. When the tide is out the tunnel can be traversed from end to end on foot. The rocks in the passage way are alive with crabs, and it is almost impossible to avoid stepping on them. At the centre of the tunnel is a little higher than the ends it drains perfectly, so that it is dry except for a few puddles. The interior walls of the tunnel present a curious appearance. They are of volcanic rock, and look as if they were thrown into their present shape when mixed with some softer substance. This has been washed away, leaving the hole through the cliff. The rock formation is exceedingly hard, and in many places has a spongy appearance. It is almost black in colour and very rough and jagged. For its full length the tunnel is about the same size, and is so straight it is hard to believe that it is not the work of human hands. In stormy weather the waves wash in and out of the tunnel with great force, and when the tide is high entirely fill it, forcing the air out with a loud hissing noise.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ADAM.—No; a license is not required.

TALENTED.—To abandon a certain position for the chance and vicissitudes of an actor's life is the height of folly.

EMERALD.—Cannot be got without premium and influence; wages rarely given; just offer yourself to any owner.

G. P.—We have not the information at hand, but you can obtain full particulars from the post-office in your neighbourhood.

LADY BOARDER.—You should remain obstinately firm in refusing to remain, otherwise you earn a reputation for mere pettishness; you will find room for yourself elsewhere.

BARTER.—As you state the case it seems a very good one, but of course much more than you tell us must be known before anyone can say definitely whether the man will be successful.

YOUTH.—It is not necessary to have a trade at your fingers' ends in order to succeed in life; strike in whatever you think you see an opening, and decide you will hold on till you emerge successful.

POPUL.—The apostrophe after an s to a name indicates the plural possessive; the thing would be more complete if an s were also put after the apostrophe, but in general practice this is not done.

TYRER.—You might get one second-hand for from £10 to £12, but it is well to make a purchase of that kind through a friend who can test the machine thoroughly; it may be a worn out thing not worth ten shillings.

WORKING MOTHER.—The penalty for neglecting to have a child vaccinated is twenty shillings, with the alternative of imprisonment, and the Act of Parliament permits repeated prosecutions with reference to the same child.

ROUNDHEAD.—Roundhead was a name given by the Cavaliers, or adherents of Charles I., during the English civil war to the members of the Puritan or Parliamentary party, who wore their hair closely cut, the Cavaliers wearing theirs in long ringlets.

FAY.—To take stains from milk from black velvet mix a little ammonia and water in equal proportions and sponge the stains out; then wet a cloth and put it on the face of a hot iron; hold the velvet over this and it will raise the pile.

BOY.—Capital punishment has been abolished in Holland, Roumania, Portugal, Belgium, Switzerland, and in several of the United States; in Austria, Sweden, Denmark, and North Germany the law is practically abrogated though not formally abolished.

WITTY.—The publican is as free to sell or to refuse to sell as any baker, butcher, draper or grocer; he may shut his shop all day and ruin himself if the fancy hits him; his shop is as much his private property as his parlour or dining-room; without his permission no one dare enter it.

P. G.—The appointments are all in the hands of the Foreign Minister, and the individuals selected are generally taken for their diplomatic ability or political services; except you have some kind of influence that can be used with the Foreign Minister you need not hope to get an appointment.

COMMONS.—If you have produced songs that are worth singing you will find much sympathy in including leading comedians to buy; write straight to any of them at the place where you see they are performing, sending copy of your best productions, so that he may get a knowledge of your style.

ONE IN DISTRESS.—We should not think of venturing advice in such a case. The most careful examination by an experienced artist is necessary, in order to ascertain what is actually wrong with the child; it is evident something much beyond what can be reached by any outward application.

BLACK AND BLUE.—Take three pounds quicklime and one pound of American pearlash; shake the lime in water, then add the pearlash, and make the whole up to the consistency of paint; apply to both sides of the glass, and leave it on for twelve hours, the putty will then be so softened that it may be easily removed.

B. A.—New Jerusalem is the name applied in Rev. xxi. 2 to the city which John saw coming down from God out of heaven. Emanuel Swedenborg interpreted this symbol as signifying the new church, whose doctrines he was commissioned to teach. The ecclesiastical organizations of his followers call themselves societies "of the New Jerusalem."

L. T.—First clean with spirits of wine, leaving some of the spirits to rest upon them, then make a paste with a little soap, whiting, and spirits of wine, lay it on carefully, and let dry; then remove with the greatest care, not allowing any of the powder to slip between. These directions only apply to real ivory; if they are made of celluloid imitation, so often now used, it will not answer.

O. R. U.—Maps are mounted upon fine linen with thin glue; then to be put on a roller; the whole map is laid upon the stretched-out linen on a flat surface lightly gone over with the glue, and is then carefully smoothed down by rubbing it from the centre with a dry clean cloth; when the map is to be folded it must be cut into convenient squares, which are laid one by one upon the glued linen and smoothed down.

SOCIETY.—All allusions to the past as contrasted with the present should be avoided in general society where all are supposed to meet on equal terms for the time being at least. And as to regard to personal criticism, to which you refer. It is difficult to indulge in it without giving offence of a serious character, and therefore it is better to avoid it, if possible, altogether, whether in the drawing-room or elsewhere.

ROSE FACE.—Fill a three quart stone or bean pot with prepared sour apples, and two quinces, pared, cored, and cut very fine. Put in layers of apple and fine quince. When half full pour in one cup of sugar, then add apples and quinces till full, and one more cup sugar and one cup of water. Cover and bake in a moderate oven for five hours. Look at it occasionally, to prevent running over, and push down gently at the edges with a knife.

PASTIE.—Two teaspoonfuls flour, one teaspoonful sugar, half teaspoonful milk, half teaspoonful soda, half teaspoonful tartaric acid, one egg; mix the flour, soda, acid and sugar in a basin, mix the egg and milk, pour this in and mix all; have a pan with fat hot, put in little bits the size of a walnut and fry till cooked through; roll the nuts in sugar when ready; this may do without the egg, but it is an improvement; bits of common bread dough make dough nuts if fried.

A FLOWERY TALE.

On her Lily forehead I pressed a kiss and whispered
Forget-me-not.

As I Rose and lingered near the door, for her Tulips
had asked my lot.

I groined aloud while I murmured and, "What good is
the Morning Glory

When the blackest night has now pierced my soul!

Alas! 'tis the same old story.

My love for you leaves no ray of light, and deeply I'll
Pine in vain!

Oh, cruel soul, may my blighted hopes on your soul
leave a Poppy stain.

A Black-eyed Susan I now shall seek—some girl who
is quite a Daisy.

To help me regain my poor Heart's ease, and make the
earth seem less hazy."

Then her Violet eyes they flashed in scorn, and her
Rose-bud lips did pout,

While my Lady's Slipper tapped the floor, and I watched
her as one in doubt.

But suddenly came a little sob. Then I clasped my
Marguerite.

She blushed Carnation, but quick I kissed these Cherry-
like lips so sweet.

My flowery tale is finished now, and life is as sweet as
Clover.

For she rules with the Golden Rod of love, which is
monarch the wide world over.

B. P. G.—One half pound ground rice, one half pound of rice flour dried and sifted, one pound of powdered sugar, half a pound of butter, four eggs, juice and half the grated rind of one lemon, one tablespoonful orange-flower water. Beat yolks and whites very lightly; then add sugar to the yolks, beat ten minutes; add the orange-flower water and lemon, lastly the flour and whites alternately. Beat for half an hour. Bake at once in patty-pans. Eat while fresh.

STRAD.—A genuine Stradivarius violin is very valuable, superior specimens commanding in the market prices ranging from hundreds to thousands of pounds. As early as 1668 Stradivarius began to use a label with his own name, as follows: "Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis faciebat, a.d. 16—" He died in 1737. As the violin in your possession has the same label and is dated 1731, it may be one of his make. We suggest that you write to some prominent dealer in musical instruments.

X. Y. Z.—Lay them on a flat table or other surface, then rub with stale bread, working the hand round and round in circles, so as to remove all purely surface dirt; then soak the prints for a short time in a dilute solution of hydrochloric acid, say one part acid to one hundred parts water; then remove them into a vessel containing a sufficient chloride of lime water to cover them; leave them there until bleached to the desired point; remove, rinse well by allowing to stand an hour in a pan in which a constant stream of water is allowed to flow; finally dry off by spreading on clean cloths; perhaps the process may be assisted by ironing the engraving between two sheets of clean paper.

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THE DOUBT AND THE SAFE SIDE.

BEFORE writing the first word of the sentence now under the reader's eye, I (the public's observer and servant) have been sitting for a matter of two hours, pen in hand, wondering what on earth to say and how to say it. For among the letters laid daily on my table there is now and then one which almost paralyses me with sheer, old-fashioned astonishment.

Here is such an one. I am going to copy it for you word for word—exactly as it is in the manuscript. It is from an evidently intelligent man. He talks straight as a plumb-line, so far as he goes. Yet something he misses. What is it? And something the doctors missed. What was it? That *he* didn't see it does not surprise me. That *they* didn't see it amazes me. Perhaps you can explain why some men take the trouble to carry their heads around on their shoulders and make so little use of them. While you cipher on that problem, I will copy out the letter according to promise. Thus it runs:—

"I was always strong and healthy up to October, 1893, when I commenced to feel weak and out of sorts. I felt heavy, tired, and had no energy. What had come over me I could not imagine. I had a foul, nasty taste in the mouth, and was constantly spitting up a thick dirty phlegm. My appetite left me, and what little food I ate lay on my stomach like lead, causing me great pain about the chest. A short distressing cough settled upon me and troubled me night and day.

"At night my sleep was disturbed with night sweats and frightful dreams. I had great pain at the left side around the heart, and my breathing was short and hurried. Next I began to spit blood, and was greatly alarmed at it. I wasted away rapidly, losing over a stone weight in a month; and became so weak that if I sat down for a short time I was unable to rise to my feet again, and had to be assisted.

"Although only a young man of twenty-six years of age, I hobbled about with a stick, and could walk no more than a short distance even then. I attended the York County Hospital, where the doctors sounded me and said *I was in a consumption*.

"They gave me cod liver oil and medicines, but I got no better. I was so low-spirited and miserable that I did not care what became of me. As month after month passed by I grew weaker and weaker.

"After ten months of suffering Mr. R. W. Dickinson, the chemist in Walmgate, advised me to try Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. After taking this medicine a few days I felt decidedly

better, my appetite reviving, and my food giving me no pain. I continued to take Mother Seigel's Syrup, and no other medicine, and soon the cough and breathing trouble left me, and I began to gain strength and flesh. When I had taken three bottles *I was strong as ever I was in my life and could eat and enjoy even a dry crust*. Since then I have enjoyed as good health as I could desire. You are at liberty to publish this letter, which is strictly true, and refer all inquirers to me. (Signed) Isaiah Lewis, 124, Walmgate, York, April 8th, 1894."

The accuracy of the above statement is vouched for by Mr. Dickinson and others who have known Mr. Lewis for several years, and were personally acquainted with the circumstances of his illness. Now let us sum up his case in a few words, and see what the surprising features of it are.

Here was a man who, if he had any of the five forms of consumption, had what is called *tubercular phthisis* or "galloping consumption," which is *always* fatal—often in from one to six weeks. Besides, it always arises from scrofula, of which latter disease Mr. Lewis *had never shown the slightest symptom*. Inasmuch as he did not die, but rapidly recovered, we are compelled to conclude that he was *not* suffering from quick consumption. The result also forbids the idea that he had any of the other forms of consumption. A man as low as he was (had his disease been consumption) would never have got perfectly well in a month, and that too under the influence of a medicine (Mother Seigel's Syrup) which acts *on the digestion alone*.

The inference is irresistible. Our friend Mr. Lewis suffered from acute indigestion, gradually becoming chronic under wrong and mistaken treatment. That he did not finally die of it is owing to his taking Mother Seigel's Syrup just when he did. His disease, then, was advanced inflammatory dyspepsia, for which this famous remedy is virtually a specific.

Now please take notice. These two diseases—dyspepsia on the one hand, and consumption on the other—are as old as the human race, and common in all countries. Yet they are essentially different, and the medical men have studied both for centuries. Why, then, should dyspepsia constantly be mistaken for consumption, with terrible results? *This is the amazing fact*.

And the common-sense deduction would seem to be that, in all cases like Mr. Lewis's, we should call the ailment *dyspepsia* (not consumption), and cure it at once by the use of the remedy that cured him.



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DR. J. COLLIS BROWNE (late Army Medical Staff), DISCOVERED A REMEDY, to denote which he coined the word **CHLORODYNE**. Dr. BROWNE is the **SOLE INVENTOR**, and, as the composition of **CHLORODYNE** cannot possibly be discovered by Analysis (organic substances defying elimination), and since the formula has never been published, it is evident that any statement to the effect that a compound is identical with Dr. BROWNE'S **CHLORODYNE** must be false.

DR. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE. Vice-Chancellor Sir W. PAGE WOOD STATED PUBLICLY in Court that Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE was **UNDOUBTEDLY** the **INVENTOR** of **CHLORODYNE**, that the whole story of the defendant, Freeman, was deliberately untrue, and he regretted to say it had been sworn to.—See *The Times*, July 18th, 1864.

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Gratefully yours,
G. SMITH,
"Band," R.I.F.

To J. T. DAVENPORT.

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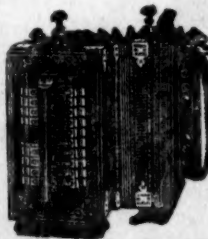
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